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A DOUBLE KNOT

A Novel

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN

AUTHOR OF

'ELI'S CHILDREN,' 'THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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A DOUBLE KNOT.



THE STORY.—YEARS AGO—(Continued).



CHAPTER I.

MR. MONTAIGNE ESTABLISHES A BOND OF SYMPATHY.

MR. PAUL MONTAIGNE was one of those quiet, bland gentlemen who, apparently without an effort, seemed to know everything that went on in his immediate neighbourhood. He never asked questions, but waited patiently, and the result was that, drawn, perhaps, by his quiet, persuasive way, people told him all he wanted to know.

Somehow, he had the knack of winning the confidence of women, and if he had been a confessor his would have been an easy task.

There were those who said that he was a Jesuit, but when it came to his ears he merely smiled pityingly, and made a point of attending church at all the week-day services, and repeating the responses in a quiet, reverent way that, combined with his closed eyes, gave him the aspect of true devoutness.

How he lived none knew, but it was supposed that he had an income from a vineyard in Central France, one which he had inherited from his father, an English gentleman who had had a taste for wine-growing.

Mr. Paul Montaigne never contradicted the rumour, and he never entered into particulars about his past. He had been the friend of the mother of Clotilde and Marie. He had brought the children over to England when quite a young man, with a very French look and a suggestion of his being a student at a French religious seminary. He had brought letters of introduction with him, and he had been in England ever since.

Time seemed to have stood still with Paul Montaigne. Certainly, he was just a shade stouter, and there were a few bright, silvery-looking hairs about his temples; in other respects he looked quite

a young man, for his smoothly-shaven face showed scarcely a line, his dark eyes were bright, and his black brows were as smoothly arched as if drawn with a pair of compasses.

Upon that smooth face there was always a pensive, half-sad smile, one which he seemed to be constantly trying to wipe off with his soft, plump, well-shaped, and very white hand, but without success, for the smile was always there—the quiet, beseeching smile, that won so many women’s confidence, but sometimes had the contrary effect upon the sterner sex.

Those who said that he was a student were to some extent right, for his modest lodgings at Teddington were well furnished with books, and he was a familiar object to many, as with his white hands clasped behind him he walked in his semi-clerical habit to and from the Palace at Hampton Court—through Bushey Park, and always on the same side of the road, making a point of pausing at the inlet of the Diana Pool to throw crumbs of bread to the eager fish, before continuing his walk in by the Lion Gate into the Palace gardens to the large fountain basin, where the great gold and silver fish also had their portion.

He never spoke to anyone; apparently nobody ever spoke to him, and he went his way to and fro, generally known as 'the priest,' making his journeys two or three times a week to call at the apartments of the Honourable Misses Dymcox to see his young pupils, as he called them, and to converse with them to keep up their French.

Upon these occasions he partook of the weak tea handed round by Joseph, and broke a portion off one of the thin biscuits that accompanied the cups. In fact, he was an institution with the Dymcox family, and had been duly taken into the ladies' confidence respecting the movement proposed by Lady Littletown.

'My dear ladies,' he had responded, 'you know my position here—my trust to the dead; I watch over the welfare of their children, and you tell me this is for their well-being. What else can I say but may your plans prosper?'

'But I would not mention it to the children, Mr. Montaigne,' said Miss Philippa.

'I mention it! My dear madam, all these years that you have known me, and is my character a sealed book to you still?'

‘For my part, I don’t like him,’ said Joseph once to Markes, and he was politely told not to be a fool. Cook, however, who had a yearning after the mysterious, proved to be of a more sympathetic mind, and when Joseph told her his opinion, that this Mr. Montaigne was only a Jesuit and a priest in disguise, cook said she shouldn’t a bit wonder, for ‘them sort often was.’

Now, cook had not seen Mr. Montaigne, so her judgment should be taken *cum grano*, as also in the case where Joseph declared Mr. Montaigne to be ‘a deep ‘un,’ when she declared that was sure to be the case.

On the night of the dinner-party at Hampton, the carriage—to wit, Mr. Buddy’s fly—had no sooner departed than Markes announced her intention of going next door to see Lady Anna Maria Morton’s maid; at which cook grunted, and, being left alone, proceeded to take out a basket from the dresser drawer, and seated herself to have what she called a couple of hours’ good darn.

One of those hours had nearly passed, and several black worsted stockings had been ornamented with

patches of rectangular embroidery, when the outer door-bell rang.

‘If that’s one of them dratted soldiers calling with his impudence, he’ll get sent off with a flea in his ear,’ cried cook.

She bounced up angrily, and made her way to the door. It was no gallant Lancer in undress uniform and a cane under his arm, but Mr. Paul Montaigne, whom cook at once knew by his description.

‘The ladies in?’ he said quietly.

‘No, sir; which, please, they’ve gone to dine at Lady Littletown’s.’

‘To be sure, yes, I had forgotten,’ he said, smiling nicely—so cook put it—at the plump domestic. ‘But never mind, I will have a few minutes’ chat with Miss Clotilde and Miss Marie.’

‘Which they’ve gone as well, sir.’

‘To be sure, yes, I ought to have known,’ said the visitor absently, ‘I ought to have remembered; and is Miss Ruth gone as well?’

‘Oh no, sir; she’s in the schoolroom all alone!’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Montaigne, raising his eyebrows. ‘Ah, well, I will not disturb—and yet, I don’t know;

I am rather tired, and I will have a few minutes' chat with her before I walk back.'

'Such a nice, mild-spoken kind of gentleman, though he had rather a papish look,' said cook ; and she ushered the visitor into the empty drawing-room, going directly after to tell Ruth.

It was growing dark, and Ruth, who was in bad spirits at having been left alone, felt a kind of shrinking, she could not have told why, from meeting Mr. Montaigne.

He had always been quiet and paternal in his treatment, and she had, as a rule, shared the lessons of Clotilde and Marie ; but, somehow, Ruth was one of the women whose confidence he had never won.

'Ah, Ruth, my child,' he said, advancing with quiet, cat-like step as she entered, and his voice sounded soft and velvety in the silence of the gloomy place, 'and so you are all alone?'

'Yes ; I will ring for candles,' she said hastily.

'No, my child, it is not necessary,' he replied, taking her hand, and leading her to the stiff, formal old sofa at the side of the room. 'I had forgotten that the dinner-party was this evening, or I should not have

walked over. As it is, dear child, I will sit down and rest for ten minutes, and then stroll back.'

'Would you like a cup of tea made for you? cook would soon have it ready,' asked Ruth.

'Oh no, no, my child,' he said softly, as he sat there, evidently forgetting that he still retained the little white hand, which, after an effort to withdraw, Ruth felt obliged to let rest where it was, prisoned now between both of Mr. Montaigne's soft sets of well-cared-for fingers, as he spoke.

'What a calm, delicious repose there always seems to be here, Ruth, within these Palace walls! The gay, noisy throng of pleasure-seekers come from the busy hive of industry, and flit and flutter about the park and gardens; their footsteps echo through the state chambers, as they gaze at the relics of a bygone time, and their voices ring with merry, thoughtless jest; but, somehow, their presence never seems to penetrate to these private apartments, where all is calmness, purity, and peace.'

'Yes; I often wonder at the way in which we seem to escape hearing them as we do,' replied Ruth, making an effort to respond; for her heart was beat-

ing painfully, and she was afraid that the visitor might note the tremor in her voice.

‘Peace and repose,’ he said softly, as he played with the hand he held. ‘The world seems far away from you here, and I often envy you the calm, unruffled existence that you enjoy. But tell me, child, did you feel disappointed at not forming one of the party this evening?’

‘I—I must confess that I should have liked to go,’ faltered Ruth.

‘Well, yes, it was very natural,’ he replied ; and as Ruth glanced quickly at him, she felt that there was a grave smile upon his face. She could barely see it, for the room was growing darker, and now, for a few moments, her tremor began to increase.

‘But Clotilde and Marie are older than I, and it was only natural that they should be preferred. And then, Mr. Montaigne, they are so beautiful.’

‘Not more beautiful than you are, Ruth.’

‘Mr. Montaigne!’

She made an effort to withdraw her hand, but it was tightly retained.

‘Not more beautiful in person, less beautiful in

mind and temperament, my child,' continued Montaigne. 'Don't try to withdraw your hand; I wish to talk seriously to you.'

Ruth felt that to struggle would be unseemly, and though she felt an undefined dread of her position, her reason seemed to combat what she was ready to condemn as fancy, and Mr. Montaigne had known her from, and still addressed her as, a 'child.'

'I should feel deeply disappointed if it were not so, Ruth; for I look upon you as one whose mind I have helped to train, whose growing intellect I have tried to form, and bias towards a love of the beautiful and pure and good.'

Ruth felt more at her ease, and less troubled that the visitor should retain her hand.

'I have, I think—nay, I boldly say—led your mind in its studies, and guided your reading,' continued Montaigne in the same low, bland voice, every tone of which was musical, deep, and sweet. It had not a harsh, jarring tone, but all was carefully modulated, and lent a charm to what he spoke.

Ruth murmured something about feeling very grateful, and wished that he would go.

‘Tell me, child,’ he said gently, and now one soft hand glided to Ruth’s wrist, and a finger rested upon her pulse, probably that the mental physician might test the regularity of the beats produced by his long-administered moral medicine, ‘what are you reading now?’

“‘Froissart’s Chronicle,’” replied Ruth.

‘An excellent work—one which leads the mind to an appreciation of chivalry and the noble deeds of the past. Any work of fiction?’

‘Ye-es,’ faltered Ruth; ‘I have read part of a novel.’

‘That the Misses Dymcox placed in your hands?’

‘No,’ faltered Ruth, speaking like a found-out child. ‘Ought I to tell you, Mr. Montaigne?’

‘Assuredly, my child. What should you keep from me?’

‘It was a work by George Eliot that Clotilde had obtained from the library.’

‘Unknown to her aunts?’

‘Yes, Mr. Montaigne; but please don’t be angry with her.’

‘No, my child, I will not.’

‘Clotilde did not like it, and threw it aside, and I happened to see it ; but I have not read much.’

‘They get novels, then ?’ said Mr. Montaigne.

‘They will be very angry with me for telling you, Mr. Montaigne.’

‘I shall not tell them, dear child ; perhaps it is natural. What is Clotilde reading now ?’

‘A French story, “Annette.”’

‘In-deed !’ said Montaigne softly ; and he drew his breath between his teeth. ‘And have you read it, child ?’

‘No, Mr. Montaigne. Miss Philippa expressly forbade our ever reading French novels ; she said they were bad.’

‘Well—yes—perhaps, my child ; but your pure, sweet young mind would eliminate the evil, and retain only the true and good. I should not debar you from such works. So you young ladies obtain novels from the library ?’

‘I do not,’ said Ruth simply. ‘But pray do not ask me such things, Mr. Montaigne ; it makes me seem to be tale-bearing about my cousins.’

‘Don’t be afraid, my child,’ continued Montaigne ;

‘let there be more confidence between us. Believe me, Ruth, you may trust me always as your best friend, and one to whom your welfare is very, very dear.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Montaigne,’ faltered Ruth; ‘I will try to think of you as you wish. Will you let me ring for candles now?’

‘Oh no, it is not necessary, my dear; I am going directly. Come, Ruth, my child, why do you shrink away? Am I so very dreadful, my little girl? There, sit still,’ he said in a whisper. ‘I shall have to make you a prisoner, while I read you a lesson on obedience and duty to those who have your welfare at heart.’

Ruth was growing alarmed, for he had softly passed one arm round her little waist, and in spite of her feeble struggles drawn her to his side.

‘There, my child, now I feel as if you were my own loving, dutiful little girl whom I had adopted; and I am going to cross-examine you like a father confessor,’ he continued playfully. ‘Ruth dear, I hope this little heart is in safe keeping.’

‘I—I do not understand you, Mr. Montaigne,’ cried Ruth, whose womanly instincts were now alarmed.

‘Will you loose me, please, and let me ring for the candles? It is quite dark.’

‘But you are not afraid of being in the dark, my child,’ he whispered; ‘and—hush! not a word.’

He laid his hand upon her lips, for just then Markes’ voice was heard outside.

‘Ruth! Miss Ruth!’

‘Sit still, foolish child!’ he whispered, holding her more tightly; ‘that woman would perhaps chatter if she knew you were here like this with me.’

A chill of horror came over Ruth, and she sat like one paralyzed, as the handle turned, the door opened, and Markes looked into the darkened room.

‘Why, where has the girl gone?’ she muttered angrily.

She went away directly, and a moment or two later her voice was heard crying:

‘She isn’t in the drawing-room, cook.’

‘You had better go up to your own room, child,’ said Montaigne softly. ‘I will go now. Do not trouble about this; for I think it weak to trust servants, whose ignorance and prejudice often lead them to wrong ideas. Good-night, my child. You

have neither father nor mother, but remember that while Paul Montaigne lives you have one who is striving to fill the place of both, as he tries to watch over you for your good.'

He had allowed her to rise now, but he still retained her hand as he stood beside her, his words for the moment disarming the resentment in her breast.

'Good-night, my dear child. I shall let myself out after you have reached your room. Good-night—good-night. Nay, your lips, Ruth, to me.'

Before she had well realized the fact, he had folded her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers. Then, loosening her from his embrace, he let her go, and, trembling and agitated as she had never been before, she ran quickly to her room.

Innocent at heart, and unskilled in the ways of the world as girl could be, as she seated herself upon the edge of the bed she ran rapidly over what had taken place.

She did not like Mr. Montaigne, and his acts towards her that night made her tremble with indignation; but these thoughts were met by another current, which seemed to tell her that she was mis-

judging him. He had spoken to her as to one who was very dear to him. His words had been those of a father to his child ; and why should she resent it ? Mr. Montaigne was not a young man, and it might seem to him that their positions had in no wise changed since she, a trembling, heart-broken little girl, fresh from a wretched home, had sat and listened to his soft, bland voice, followed his instructions, and had her curls smoothed by his soft white hand.

‘ But I am a woman grown now, and it is dreadful,’ she cried, bursting into a passion of indignant tears. ‘ I don’t like it. I will speak to Miss Philippa. I don’t think it is right.’

‘ Are you there, Miss Ruth ?’

‘ Yes, Markes.’

‘ Oh, that’s right. I thought you was lost. Cook told me you were in the drawing-room when I came in. There, child, don’t sit and mope in the dark because you did not get asked to the party. You’ll be a woman soon, my dear, and maybe they’ll find you a husband like the rest.’

‘ Child !’ Yes, it was always ‘ child ;’ but the girl’s heart rebelled against the appellation. These elderly

maidens could not think of her as one whose mind was ripening fast, in spite of the sunless seclusion in which she lived.

‘I’ll tell Markes,’ she thought, as her heart throbbed with the recollection of that which had passed. But no; she could not. There was something repellent in this woman’s ways, and at last, with her brain in a tumult with conflicting ideas, Ruth sought her pillow, while Paul Montaigne, with a curious smile upon his face, was still pacing his room after his dark walk back to Teddington, one hand clasping the other, as if he still held Ruth’s.

‘No,’ he said, ‘she will not say a word. It is not likely. There is a bond of sympathy between us now.’

He walked up and down a little longer, and then stood still, talking softly—half aloud.

‘Woman is our master, they say; but let her be led to compromise herself, however slightly, and she becomes the slave. Poor little Ruth, she is very innocent and sweet.’

CHAPTER II.

LOVE PAINTS AND DECORATES.

THE change at the Honourable Misses Dymcox's home was something so startling that Ruth was almost bewildered. Even on the following morning at breakfast, after Joseph had brought in the urn, the alteration had begun.

The wine of the last night's party might have been fancied to be still having its influence, the ladies were so much less austere.

'I'm very, very glad you enjoyed yourselves so much, my dears,' said the Honourable Philippa, smiling.

'You feel none the worse, my loves?' said the Honourable Isabella.

'Oh no, aunt,' said Clotilde; 'I feel better. Don't you, Marie?'

‘Oh yes,’ said that young lady; ‘it was a delightful party.’

‘It was, my dears,’ said the Honourable Philippa, letting the water from the urn run over the top of the teapot. ‘Bless me, how careless! I am glad I consented to allow you both to go, for you see how necessary to a proper state of existence a due amount of money becomes.’

‘How admirably dear Lady Littletown manages her income!’ said the Honourable Isabella.

‘Yes, and how needful a good income really is! Yes, it was a very *distingue* dinner. Marie, my child, Lord Henry Moorpark is most gentlemanly, is he not?’

‘Oh yes, I like him very much,’ replied Marie, with animation, and a slight flush in her cheek, for she had been suddenly appealed to when thinking about Marcus Glen, and the way he had glanced at her more than once. ‘He seems a very nice old gentleman.’

‘Hem!’ coughed the Honourable Philippa austere-ly. ‘I do not think him old.’

‘Certainly not!’ exclaimed the Honourable Isabella; ‘hardly elderly.’

‘Decidedly no,’ continued the Honourable Philippa. ‘By the way, Clotilde, my love, you found Mr. Elbraham very pleasant?’

‘Oh yes, aunt.’

‘I am glad of it,’ said the Honourable Philippa, smiling graciously, while Ruth, open-eyed and listening, went on with her breakfast, wondering at the change. ‘He is the great financier—enormously wealthy. I hear that he is to be made a duke by the Austrian emperor. He is already a chevalier.’

‘Indeed, aunt?’ said Clotilde, who also was thinking of Captain Glen.

‘Yes, my dear; his houses are a marvel, I believe, for their wealth and display.’

‘Is he a Jew, aunt?’ said Marie innocently.

‘My dear child, no! How can you ask such a question, Marie? I have heard something about his family being of Hebrew descent—Eastern Hebrew descent—Elbraham, Abraham, very ancient, no doubt; but I don’t know for certain, and really I do not care to know: for what does it matter?’

‘Yes, what indeed?’ said her sister. ‘A very gentlemanly, highly-cultured man.’

‘With a wonderful knowledge of the world and its ways. He has been a deal in Egypt, did not Lady Littletown say, Isabella?’

‘Yes, with the Khedive,’ was the reply. ‘Enormously wealthy.’

The breakfast ended, the young ladies were dismissed.

‘I would not go to the schoolroom this morning, my dears,’ said the elder sister; ‘go and lie down for an hour or two and rest. After lunch Lady Littletown is coming with the carriage to take you for a drive, and I should like you to look your best.’

‘Rie,’ exclaimed Clotilde, as soon as they were in their room with Ruth, who was debating in her own mind whether she ought not to take her cousins into her confidence about Mr. Montaigne, but shrinking from relating the communication to such unsympathetic ears.

‘Well?’

‘You, Ruth, if you dare to say a word about what we talk about, I’ll kill you!’ cried Clotilde.

‘I think you may trust me,’ said Ruth, smiling.

‘Then mind you do keep secret,’ continued Clotilde. ‘Rie,’ she cried again, ‘I can see through it all ; I know what it means.’

‘Do you ?’ said Marie quietly.

‘Yes, they’re going to sell us both—a bargain.’

‘Are they?’ said Marie, who was thinking she would like to be sold to Marcus Glen.

‘Yes, it’s going to be like it was in that novel of Georges Sand. We’re to be married to rich old men because we are young and beautiful ; and if they marry me to one, I’m sorry for the old man.’

‘Do you think so ?’

‘Yes, I do,’ exclaimed Clotilde ; ‘else why were we dressed up, and sent down to dinner with that old Jew, and that old, yellow Lord Henry Moorpark, when there were those young officers there ?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Marie thoughtfully, as once more her mind reverted to Captain Glen.

‘Then I do,’ cried Clotilde, with flashing eyes. ‘I should like to be married, and have an establishment, and diamonds, and servants ; but if they make me marry that dreadful man——’

‘Well, what?’ said Marie, with a depth of thought in her handsome eyes.

‘You’ll see!’ cried Clotilde; and thrusting her hand in between the mattress and the paillasse, she dragged out the highly-moral paper-covered French novel that had lain there *perdu*.

After the genial thawing of the ice there could be no more such severe and cutting behaviour as that which marked the meeting of Captain Glen and Richard Millet with the Dymcox family; and a day or two later, when the two officers were idling about the broad walks, with the boy’s eyes watching in all directions, but only to be disappointed at every turn, they came suddenly upon the party taking their morning walk.

‘No, my dears,’ the Honourable Philippa was saying, in reply to a request made by Clotilde; ‘the park is impassable, for the scenes that take place there are a disgrace to humanity, and the Government ought to be forced to interfere. It is not so very long ago that your aunt and I were thoughtfully walking beneath the trees—that glorious avenue of chestnuts, that we poor occupants of the Palace can only view free from

insult at early morn or late in the evening—I say your aunt and I were pensively walking beneath the trees, when we stumbled full upon a coarse-minded crew of people sitting eating and drinking upon the grass, and a dreadful-looking man with a shiny head held up a great stone bottle and wanted us to drink. You remember, Isabella ?’

‘Yes, sister ; and we fled down the avenue, to come upon another party engaged in some orgie. They had joined hands in a circle like savages, and one dreadful man was pursuing a woman, whom he captured, and in spite of her shrieks——’

‘I think we had better not pursue the subject further, Isabella,’ said the Honourable Philippa ; ‘it is not a seemly one in the presence of young ladies. I need only tell you, my dears, that they were engaged in a rite popular among the lower orders—a sort of sport called “kiss-in-the-ring.”’

‘Hush, sister !’ whispered the Honourable Isabella ; ‘the gentlemen.’

Poor Isabella’s hands began to tremble in a peculiar, nervous way as tall, English-looking Marcus Glen approached, appearing so much the more manly for

having dapper Richard Millet by his side. The lady was not foolish enough to imagine that Glen wished to be attentive to her, but there was a sweet, regretful kind of pleasure in his presence, and when he spoke her withered heart seemed to expand, and old affections that had been laid up to dry, like sweet-scented flowers between leaves, began to put forth once again their forgotten odours, as if they were evoked by the presence of the sun.

The Honourable Philippa looked stern, and would have passed on with a bow; but when her sister put forth her trembling hand, and smiled with satisfaction at meeting the young officer again, such a line of conduct was impossible; and, as a matter of course, there was a very friendly greeting all round.

The Honourable Philippa felt frigid as she saw Marie's eyes brighten, and that a charmingly ingenuous blush rose in her cheeks; she felt more frigid as she saw the greeting between Clotilde and Glen; for if ever girl looked her satisfaction at seeing anyone again, the ascetically-reared Clotilde was that maiden, and, truth to tell, in the innocence and guilelessness

of her heart she returned the pressure of the young officer's hand as warmly as it was given.

As for Richard Millet, he began by blushing like a girl ; then, making an effort, he mastered his timidity, and shone almost as brightly as his new patent-leather boots, thinking, too, how well he managed to get the young ladies all to himself ; while Marcus talked quietly, and in a matter-of-fact way, to the Honourable Misses Dymcox, till Philippa grew a little less austere, and her hand felt at parting not quite so much like five pieces of bone in as many finger-stalls.

There was another unmistakable pressure from Clotilde's hand, too, and a far more timid one from that of Marie, whose eyes wore a curiously pensive look, as the gentlemen doffed their hats and went their way.

It is worthy of note that poor Ruth passed an exceedingly uncomfortable day, being made aware of what was as nearly a couple of quarrels as could take place between ladies. The first took place in the drawing-room, where, after bidding Clotilde and Marie go and take off their things, the Honourable Philippa fiercely attacked her sister upon her levity.

‘*Shocked*, Isabella! I can find no other word for it—*shocked*!’ she exclaimed. ‘Your conduct to-day with those two young men was really objectionable.’

‘I deny it, sister,’ retorted the Honourable Isabella. ‘We met two of dear Lady Littletown’s guests whom we knew, and we spoke to them. They are both officers and gentlemen, and nothing, I am sure, could have been nicer than the behaviour of Captain Glen.’

‘Is—a—bella!’ exclaimed her sister, ‘when you know what is being arranged. It is like madness to encourage the intimacy of those young men.’

‘Perhaps they wish to be intimate for politeness’ sake,’ said the Honourable Isabella demurely, though her nervous hands were trembling and playing about the puckers of her dress.

‘I declare, sister, you are absurd, you are almost childish; as if young men—young officers—cared about politeness when there were ladies like our nieces in the case.’

‘Well, sister,’ replied the Honourable Isabella tearfully, ‘I am sure I don’t know, but for my part I would rather see Clotilde and Marie married to Captain

Glen and Mr. Millet than as you and dear Lady Little-town had arranged.'

'And you!' cried her sister; 'you were as eager as anyone, and you know how it will be for their good. Our family will be raised from penury to affluence, and we shall have done our duty, I am sure.'

'But it seems very sad, sister — very sad indeed.'

'Fie, Isabella!' exclaimed the Honourable Philippa; 'what would Lady Little-town think if she heard of such miserable weakness? Think, too, what would Lord Henry Moorpark or Mr. Elbraham say if they knew that these young men were encouraged here? It must be stopped, or encouraged very coldly indeed. Yes, Markes, what is it?'

'This box, please'm, and this little basket, please'm,' said the woman.

'How often have we told you, Markes, that all these things should be left to Joseph to bring up? It is not your duty,' exclaimed the Honourable Philippa. 'Now, let me see.'

The box was directed to her, so was the basket; and reading the direction by the aid of her large gold eye-

glass, she afterwards cut the box string, and on opening the loose lid set free a marvellously beautiful bouquet of very choice flowers.

The basket was opened, and contained another bouquet, but there was no message, no letter, with either.

The Honourable Philippa gazed at the Honourable Isabella, and that lady returned the meaning gaze ; then they sent Markes away with the empty box and basket, leaving the elderly sisters to commune alone, and to whisper their satisfaction, in spite of a little hanging back on the part of the Honourable Isabella, that matters had progressed so well.

Meanwhile there was a cloudiness in the moral atmosphere upstairs which betokened a storm.

Ruth saw it and trembled, for hour by hour her cousins had seemed to her to change.

She did not know how it was—in fact, she was puzzled ; but the change was very natural. The two girls had been treated somewhat after the fashion of flowers, and grown on and on in their cool retirement until they had attained to their full development and beauty, though as yet only in a state of bud. Then

they had suddenly been placed in the full blaze of society's sunshine.

The effect was what might have been expected. The buds had suddenly expanded ; every latent thought of suppressed womanhood had burst into light and passionate life ; every kept-down fancy and desire that had been in abeyance had started forth, and the buds were in full bloom, just as some choice exotic will in a few hours be completely transformed.

Very little was said for a time, but as the sisters removed their walking apparel there was more than one fierce look exchanged.

'I saw her look at him,' thought Clotilde ; 'and I'd kill her sooner than she should.'

'Such outrageous effrontery!' thought Marie ; 'but she does not know me if she thinks I am going to sit down quietly and let her win.'

'Enjoy your walk, dear?' said Clotilde, attitudinizing before the glass, and admiring herself with half-closed eyes.

'Oh yes, Clo dear, it was delightful ; but you shouldn't flirt so with that little boy.'

'Now that's too bad, dear,' retorted Clotilde, turn-

ing half round to smile sweetly at her sister. 'You know that it was you. I felt quite ashamed sometimes to see how you went on.'

Ruth's eyes grew a little more wide open as she heard this, for she thought that poor little Richard Millet seemed to be left to talk to her more than he liked.

'Oh, nonsense, love,' replied Marie. 'But you don't mean it, you know ;' and then the sisters smiled most affectionately one at the other, and gazed curiously in each other's eyes.

But as they smiled and looked affectionately at each other, they seemed to need an outlet for the wrath that was gathering fast, and poor Ruth's was the head upon which this poured. The tears stood in her eyes again and again, as first one and then the other displayed her irritation in words, pushes, and more than once in what seemed greatly like blows, all of which was borne in a patient, long-suffering manner. For Ruth was far worse off than a servant, the least independent of which class of young lady would not have submitted to a tithe of the insult and annoyance that fell to the poor girl's share.

Upon the present occasion the loud jangling of the bell, that was swung about and shaken by Joseph as if he detested the brazen creation, announced that lunch was ready, the mid-day repast by a pleasant fiction retaining that name, though no late dinner followed, the evening meal taking the form of tea and thick bread, and butter of the kind known as 'best Dorset, and regarding whose birth there is always a mystery.'

The looks of the sisters were anything but bright and loving as they went down, followed by Ruth, who secretly drew up her sleeve, displaying her white, well-moulded arm as she ruefully inspected a black mark—to wit, the bruise made by a forcible pinch from Clotilde's nervous finger and thumb.

The poor girl heaved a little sigh as she drew back her gingham sleeve—gingham and alpaca being fabrics highly in favour with the Honourable Misses Dymcox—though they always insisted upon calling the latter by the name of 'stuff'—on economical grounds. Then she meekly took her place, grace was said, and the Honourable Isabella proceeded to dispense the mutton broth, richly studded with pearls

of barley to the exclusion of a good deal of meat, Joseph giving quite a dignity to the proceedings as he waited at table, removing the soup-tureen cover with an artistic flourish, and turning it bottom upwards so as not to let a drop of the condensed steam fall upon the cloth, though a drop reached Ruth, whose fate it seemed to be to get the worst of everything, even to the boniest portions of the substance of the mutton broth, and the crustiest, driest pieces of the day before yesterday's bread.

But there was a becoming dignity in Miss Philippa's manners upon the present occasion, and she sipped her broth and played with the barley as if she anticipated finding pearls in place of unpleasant little sharp splinters of scrag of mutton bone.

'Thank you, yes, Joseph,' she said quietly, as the man brought round a very small jug of the smallest beer, and poured out a wineglassful each for the elderly sisters, without froth, so that it might look like sherry, or that delicious elderly maiden lady's beverage known as marsala.

'Oh, by the way, sister,' said Miss Isabella, 'did you think to mention about town?'

‘Oh no, I did not,’ said Miss Philippa. ‘By the way, Joseph, you will order the carriage for nine o’clock to-morrow morning.’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Joseph, who was handing potatoes to the mutton broth.

‘We must go in good time, for we shall have to visit the tailor’s about your new livery, Joseph.’

Joseph’s jaw dropped like the lower lids of his eyes, and a very waxy potato from the dish as he sloped it down, the said potato gambolling gaily across the cloth as if under the idea that it was a vegetable cricket-ball, and that its duty was to hit Ruth’s high-backed chair wicket fashion on the other side. It was, however, carefully blocked by that young lady with a spoon, and after a moment’s hesitation deposited in her soup-plate, her cousins, however, eyeing it jealously from old habit, as if they thought she was getting more than her share.

‘Be careful, Joseph,’ said Miss Philippa with severity; and Joseph was careful as he went on waiting; but the perspiration broke out profusely over his forehead, and he seemed, as he gazed from one to the other of his mistresses, as though the news,

so unaccustomed in its way, was almost greater than he could bear.

‘Bring those bouquets from the drawing-room, Joseph,’ said Miss Philippa, just before the removal of the soup-tureen.

Joseph went out, and, to the astonishment of the young ladies, returned with the presents.

‘Take that one to Miss Clotilde,’ said Miss Philippa, beaming on the eldest of the young ladies, as she indicated the gayest of the carefully built up bunches of flowers. ‘Yes; and now that one to Miss Marie.’

The bouquets were handed to the young ladies in turn.

‘Now remove the soup-tureen,’ said Miss Philippa.

‘Oh, aunt!’ exclaimed Clotilde, as Joseph left the room.

‘What lovely flowers!’ cried Marie, holding them to her face.

‘Yes, yes; yes, yes!’ cried Miss Philippa in a highly pitched and very much cracked but playful voice. ‘I don’t know what to say to it, I’m sure; do you, sister?’

‘No, indeed—indeed,’ cried Miss Isabella, in an imitation playful tone.

‘It seems to me that our quiet little innocent home is being laid siege to by gentlemen,’ prattled Miss Philippa.

‘And—and I don’t know what’s coming to us,’ said Miss Isabella gaily ; and her hands shook, and her head nodded as she laughed, a sad ghost of a youthful hearty sign of mirth.

‘But is this for me, aunt ?’ cried Clotilde, flushing up, and looking handsome in the extreme.

‘And this for me, aunt ?’ cried Marie, whose cheeks could not brook the rivalry displayed by those of her sister.

‘Oh, I don’t know, my dears, I’m sure ; but it’s very, very, very, very shocking, and you are both very, very, very, very naughty girls to look so handsome, and go to dinner-parties, and captivate gentlemen.’

‘And make them lay offerings before your shrines,’ prattled Miss Isabella.

‘Floral offerings before your shrines,’ repeated Miss Philippa, who nodded her approval of her sister’s poetical comparison.

‘But, aunt, who sent them?’

‘Oh, it’s no use to ask me, my dear,’ exclaimed Miss Philippa. ‘There may be a wicked little note inside. I don’t know. I don’t understand such things. They are beyond me.’

‘Oh yes, quite beyond us, my dear,’ said Miss Isabella; and she laid her hand upon her side as she felt a curious little palpitation, and there was a pathetic sadness in her withered face, as she began thinking of Captain Glen.

‘But somebody must have sent them, aunties,’ said Marie, who dropped into the diminutive, and slightly endearing, appellative quite naturally, now that she found herself being exalted by her relatives.

‘Oh yes, my dears, of course—of course,’ said Miss Philippa: ‘someone must have sent them. Mind,’ she cried, shaking one finger, ‘I don’t say that those beautiful, those lovely exotics were sent to you by Lord Henry Moorpark. And I don’t say—no: you don’t say, sister——’

‘Yes, of course,’ cried Miss Isabella, clumsily taking up the cue given to her, and shaking her thin finger very slightly, for it shook itself naturally a

good deal, 'I don't say, Clotilde, my dear, that that delicious and most expensive bouquet was sent by the great wealthy Mr. Elbraham; but I've a very shrewd suspicion. Haven't you, sister?'

'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,' cried Miss Philippa playfully. 'A little bird at dear Lady Littletown's whispered a little something in my ear. But it's very, very shocking, isn't it, sister?'

'Oh yes,' cried Miss Isabella, repeating her sad little laugh, her head nodding very much the while; 'but fie—fie—fie! Hush—hush—hush! Here is Joseph coming to change the plates.'

Joseph it was, and as he changed the plates Clotilde held her bouquet to her flushed cheeks in turn, and gazed at Marie, who held the flowers to her own cheeks, both of which were creamy white as some of the blossoms; and she, too, gazed rather curiously at her sister, trying to read her meaning in her eyes.

But nobody paid any heed to Ruth, who looked wistfully at the gorgeous colours in Clotilde's bouquet, and the delicate tints in that of Marie, and she could not help wishing that someone sent her

flowers—someone, say, like Captain Glen. Then she thought of Mr. Montaigne, and she shivered, she hardly knew why, as she asked herself whether she ought not to have told her aunts of his visit and his ways. Then her thoughts were brought back to the happy present by Joseph placing a large section of ‘role-y-poley’ pudding before her upon a plate—not the ordinary homely ‘role-y-poley’ pudding, with flaky pastry and luscious gushings of the sweetest jam ; but a peculiarly hard, mechanical style of compound which kept its shape, and in which the preserve presented itself in a rich streak of pink, starting from the centre, and winding round and round to the circumference, as if cook had turned artist, and was trying to perpetuate the neighbouring Maze in pastry at the least expenditure in cost.

The cheese which followed was Glo’ster of the ducal sound and soapy consistency, and then the empty plates, representing dessert, were placed upon the table—there was no fruit that day ; grace had been said, and the ladies rose, Clotilde and Marie being kissed, and advised to place their bouquets in water in the drawing-room.

‘They would look so nice if anyone called, my dears,’ said Miss Philippa.

‘Which they might, you know, my darling,’ added Miss Isabella, smiling, and nodding her head.

So the flowers were placed in vases, duly watered, and the young ladies went up once more to their room, under orders to quickly redescend.

‘There!’ cried Clotilde maliciously, as soon as they were alone, ‘I knew it—I knew it! Ruth! Cindy! Do you hear! Go down on one knee, and kiss the hand of the future Viscountess or Baroness, or whatever she is to be, Lady Moorpark.’

‘No, don’t, Ruth,’ cried Marie fiercely. ‘Go and salute the future Mrs. Elbraham. Let me see, Clo dear; do ladies who marry Jews become Jewesses?’

‘Perhaps they do,’ cried Clotilde, who had no repartee ready.

Marie laughed. ‘Jew—Jewess! Clo—old Clo! I wonder whether Mr. Elbraham made his money that way? Eh, Clo dear?’

‘I shall throw the water-bottle or the jug at you directly,’ cried Clotilde, as she washed her hands. ‘Never mind: he is rich, and not old. I wouldn’t

marry a yellow, snuffy old man, if he were ten thousand lords. There !'

'Who's going to marry him ?' said Marie scornfully.

'You are. You'll be obliged to,' retorted Clotilde.

'I wonder,' said Marie, 'whether Mr. Elbraham is going to buy you of aunties, and if so, how much he is going to give.'

Clotilde faced round at this sting.

'If you think I'm going to marry him, or if aunts think so, they are mistaken!' she cried. 'I know what I am going to do. I know something that you would give your ears to know, my lady.'

She looked mockingly at her sister, and waved her hand, as if wafting a kiss through the air.

Marie did not respond, but there was something in her eyes that troubled Ruth, who, being near, laid her hand in a sympathetic fashion upon her arm.

A summons from Markes put a stop to further conversation.

'What is it, Markes ?' cried Clotilde.

'Aunts want you,' said the woman roughly.

‘Gentlemen visitors ;’ and before she could be further questioned she closed the door.

‘I know,’ cried Clotilde, darting a malicious glance at her sister : ‘it’s Captain Glen, and he has brought his little squire with him. Come along down, and speak to Richard Millet, while I talk to the Captain. I say, Rie, dear.’

‘Well ?’

‘What a nice little husband he would make—quite a lady’s page !’

“‘ My pretty page, look out afar,
Look out, look out afar,’ ”

she sang ; but Marie seemed hardly to notice her, for she was very quiet and thoughtful, as she gave a touch or two to her hair.

‘There, that will do ; come along—you won’t be noticed.’

Marie glanced at her sharply, and the blood suffused her cheeks ; but she said nothing, only beckoned to Ruth to come, and they had nearly reached the drawing-room door when they met Markes, who took Ruth into custody.

‘Not you, my dear,’ she said quietly—‘you’re to stop ; it’s them that’s to go.’

As she laid her hand upon the door Clotilde’s heart beat fast, while a look of delight flushed her countenance. At the same time, though, she wondered that Marcus Glen and his friend should have called so soon.

‘The silly old things !’ she thought ; ‘they could not see that the bouquets came from the Captain and Mr. Millet.’

Then she glanced round to see that her sister was close beside her, opened the door, and entered.

Disappointment !

Seated with their backs to the window were Mr. Elbraham and Lord Henry Moorpark. The Fates had ordained that they should make their calls both at the same hour, and they now rose to meet Clotilde and Marie.

‘Then they did send the bouquets,’ thought Clotilde ; and her heart sank at the thought of their aunts’ innuendoes meaning anything serious.

Had she or her sister any doubts, they were soon chased away ; for, though this was made quite a formal

visit, there was a something quite unmistakable in their visitors' ways.

Lord Henry and Elbraham had encountered close by the door, and a look of distrust overspread their features as they exchanged an exceedingly cool salutation; but soon after their meeting the elder and the younger sisters, matters seemed so satisfactory, that their breasts expanded with quite a brotherly feeling.

Elbraham had the natural dislike of a man of his stamp for one who happened to be high-born, and was by nature refined and amiable; while Lord Henry, with his gentlemanly notions of polish, felt rather a shrinking from the blatant man of the world, whose manners were not always separated from the dross that clings to badly-refined metal. But in a very short time each saw that he was on a different route, and that there was no likelihood of their clashing in their onward journey.

The Honourable sisters were amiability itself, and played most cleverly into their visitors' hands; while, in spite of a feeling of repugnance and disgust at the idea of their being, as it were, sold into bondage to men so much older than themselves, and so very far

from their hearts' ideal of a lover, both Clotilde and Marie felt flattered.

For as Clotilde listened to Elbraham's deep voice, and gazed unflinchingly in his coarse face, she saw through him, as it were, and beyond him, visions of life and gaiety, of a princely establishment, with servants and carriages and plate, and, for her own special use, the richest of dresses, the brightest of bonnets, and jewels as many as she would.

Marie, too, as she listened to the polished, deferential remarks of Lord Henry Moorpark, and saw the deep interest and admiration that beamed from his eyes, could not help thoughts of a similar character crossing her mind. Lord Henry was certainly old, but he was the perfection of all that was gentlemanly, and his deference for the young and beautiful woman to whom he was certainly paying his court had for her something that was very grateful to her feelings, while it was flattering to her self-esteem.

But interposing, as it were, between them and the visitors, the frank, manly countenance of Marcus Glen was constantly rising before the young girls' vision, making them thoughtful and distant as their visitors

chatted on. This, however, only added to their attraction, especially in Lord Henry's eyes. To him even the shabby furniture and their simple dresses lent a piquancy that he would have missed had they been elsewhere; and at last, when he rose to take his leave, both gentlemen stepped out into the open air feeling as if their paths were in future to be strewn with roses, and ready to become brothers on the spot.

‘Shall we take a walk in the gardens for a few minutes, my lord?’ said Elbraham, as they stood together outside.

‘With much pleasure, Mr. Elbraham,’ replied Lord Henry.

‘Then I’ll just hook on,’ said Elbraham.

He did ‘hook on’—to wit, he took Lord Henry’s arm; and that gentleman did not shrink, but walked with the millionaire down one of the broad walks between the trim lawns, both for the time being silent.

‘I’m a man of the world,’ said Mr. Elbraham at last.

‘Indeed,’ said Lord Henry.

‘Yes, my lord, and I’m going to speak out like a man of that sort.’

Lord Henry bowed and smiled, for he had Marie’s

great dark eyes before him, and the memory was very pleasant at the time.

‘Just an hour ago, my lord, when I met you at that door, I felt as if we two were to be enemies.’

‘Indeed,’ said Lord Henry again.

‘Yes, my lord ; but now I don’t think we are.’

‘Surely not.’

‘To be plain then, my lord, I am going to propose in due form for the hand of Miss Clotilde.’

Lord Henry stopped short, with his eyes half closed, and one foot beating the gravel as if he were thinking out an answer to the remark made by the man who held his arm.

‘Well, my lord, what have you got to say ?’

‘Not much,’ said Lord Henry, rousing himself ; ‘but I will be frank and plain to you, Mr. Elbraham, though no one is more surprised at this change in my prospects than I. You are going to propose for the hand of Miss Clotilde, one of the most beautiful women I ever saw.’

‘Eh !’ exclaimed Elbraham, whose jaw dropped, ‘don’t say that.’

‘But I do say it,’ said Lord Henry, smiling, and

looking very dreamy and thoughtful: 'the most beautiful woman I ever saw—except her sister—for whose hand I shall become a candidate myself.'

'Hah!' ejaculated Mr. Elbraham, with a sigh of relief; 'then look here, my lord, under these circumstances we shall be brothers-in-law.'

'Probably so.'

'Then we'll have no more ceremony. Look here, my lord, I'm a plain man, and I don't boast of my blood nor my position, but I'm warm; and a fellow can't find a better friend than I can be when I take to a man. I like you. You've got blood, and a title, and all that sort of thing; but that isn't all: you're a gentleman, without any haw-haw, sit-upon-a-fellow airs. Moorpark, there's my hand, and from henceforth I'll back you up in anything.'

'Thank you, Mr. Elbraham,' said Lord Henry, smiling, for in his then frame of mind the coarse manners of his companion were kept from jarring by the roses that metaphorically hedged him in. 'There, then, is my hand, and I'm sure we shall be the best of friends.'

'And brothers,' exclaimed Elbraham, giving Lord

Henry exquisite pain, which he bore like a martyr, by crushing his fingers against a heavy signet ring.

‘God bless you, Moorpark ! God bless you !’

There was more than a trace of emotion in Lord Henry’s eyes just then, as he warmly returned the other’s grasp ; and then they walked on together.

‘I shan’t shilly-shally, Moorpark,’ exclaimed Elbraham hoarsely. ‘I shall send her down a few diamonds and things at once. What’s the use of waiting ?’

‘Ay, what, indeed !’ said Lord Henry, smiling. ‘Besides, my friend, we are too old.’

‘Well, I don’t know so much about that, Moorpark. A man’s as old as he feels ; and hang it, sir, when I’m in the presence of that woman, sir, I feel two-and-twenty.’

‘Well, yes ; it does make one feel young and hopeful, and as if we imbibed some of their sweetness and youth, Elbraham.’

‘Sweetness and youth ! Ah, that’s it, Moorpark. Sweetness and youth—they’re full of it. Miss Riversley’s lovely, ain’t she ?’

‘Truly a beautiful woman.’

‘That she is,’ said Elbraham. ‘Though, for the fact of that, Marie is not to be sneezed at.’

‘No, by no means,’ assented Lord Henry, whose brow knit a little here. ‘They are very charming, and thoroughly unspoiled by the world.’

‘That’s the beauty of them, Moorpark, and that’s what fetches me, my dear boy. Lord bless your heart! with my money I could have married a thousand women. I’m not boasting, Moorpark, but I can assure you I’ve stood up like a stump, and duchesses, and countesses, and viscountesses, and my lady this and my lady that, have for any number of years bowled their daughters at me, and I might have had my pick and choice,’ said Elbraham—apparently forgetting in his excitement that there was a trifling degree of exaggeration in his words, for his efforts to get into high-class society had not been successful on the whole.

‘I am not surprised—with your wealth,’ said Lord Henry.

‘Yes, I am warm,’ continued Elbraham; ‘and the best of the fun is, that they were all ready to forget that I was a Jew. For I don’t mind speaking plainly

to you : I have some of the chosen blood in my veins, though I have changed over. But that's neither here nor there.'

'Of course not,' assented Lord Henry.

'And what I like in our beauties is, that they look as if they'd got some of the chosen blood in them.'

'Ye-e-es,' assented Lord Henry ; 'they are dark, with the Southern look in their complexions. But it improves them.'

'Improves ! I should think it does. Why, look here, Moorpark, you saw Clotilde to-day in that plain cotton dress thing, or whatever it was ?'

'Yes, and she looked beautiful as her sister,' said Lord Henry warmly.

'She did—she did. But wait a bit, my boy. I'll hang diamonds and pearls round that girl's neck, and stick tiaras in her hair, and bracelets on her arms, till I make even the princesses envious—that I will. But now, look here, I'm glad we've come to an understanding. You'll dine with me at my club, Moorpark ? Don't say no.'

'With pleasure, if you will dine with me.'

'Done. Where do you hang out ?'

‘Four hundred and four, Berkeley Square.’

‘Say Monday for me, at the Imperial—seven sharp ; and we’ll settle when I come to you.’

‘At seven on Monday,’ said Lord Henry, ‘I will be there.’

‘And now I must be off back to town. Good-bye, God bless you, Moorpark. One word first : you’ll like to do it handsome, of course, in presents, and that sort of thing.’

‘Indeed I shall not be ungenerous as soon as I know her tastes.’

‘Then look here, Moorpark, these things cost money.’

‘Assuredly.’

‘Then can I do anything for you ? A few thousands on your simple note of hand ? Only say the word. No dealing—no interest. Just a simple loan. How much ?’

‘My dear Elbraham,’ said Lord Henry, ‘you are very kind ; but I have a handsome balance at my bank. I am a man of very simple tastes, and I have never lived half up to my income.’

‘Then you must be worth a pot,’ exclaimed Elbraham. ‘I mean, you are really rich.’

‘Well, I suppose I am,’ said Lord Henry, smiling ;
‘but I care very little for money, I assure you.’

‘That’ll do,’ exclaimed Elbraham, crushing the other’s hand once more. ‘Good-bye. Monday.’

By this time they had reached the spot where their carriages were waiting—Elbraham’s a phaeton, with a magnificent pair of bays, whose sides were flecked with the foam they had formed in champing their bits ; Lord Henry’s a neat little brougham drawn by a handsome roan.

Then there was a wave of the hand, and Elbraham took his whip, the bays starting off at a rapid trot, while, having let himself into his brougham, Lord Henry gave the word ‘Home,’ and leaned back with the tears in his eyes to think how soon he was finding consolation for the coldness with which he had been treated by Gertrude Millet. Then he felt slightly uneasy, for though he had never spoken to Lady Millet, his visits had been suggestive, and he could not help asking himself what her ladyship would say.

But that soon passed off, as he began to glide into a delightful day-dream about beautiful Marie, and to think how strange it was that, at his age, he

should have fallen fairly and honestly in love with an innocent, heart-whole, unspoiled girl.

‘Yes, so different to Gertrude Millet,’ he said to himself. ‘She loved that young Huish, I am sure.’

CHAPTER III.

LADY MILLET'S CHOICE.

RICH men are not always to be congratulated, especially if they are good-looking and weak. Frank Morrison was both, and in early days after her wedding Renée found that a loveless marriage was not all bliss.

But she had marked out her own course, and, with the hopefulness of youth, she often sat alone, thinking that she would win her husband entirely to herself, and that when he fully saw her devotion he would give up acquaintances whom he must have known before they were wed.

One Sunday evening, and she was seated waiting, when she heard a well-known step upon the stairs.

It was quite dinner-time, and she was waiting,

dressed, for her husband's return, looking sad, but very sweet and self-possessed ; and as he entered the room she ran to meet him, put her arms round his neck and kissed him on lips that had been caressing others not an hour before.

‘ Ah, Renée,’ he said quietly, ‘ waiting dinner ? So sorry, little woman. I could not get near a telegraph office, or I would have sent and told you.’

‘ I have not waited long, Frank,’ she said cheerfully. ‘ I am so glad you have come back.’

‘ But that is not what I meant, dear,’ he replied. ‘ I am only returned to dress. I dine out.’

‘ Dine out, Frank ?’ she said, trying hard not to seem troubled.

‘ Yes—obliged to. Two or three fellows at the club. Couldn't refuse. You will excuse me to-night, little one ?’

‘ Oh yes, Frank,’ she said quickly, ‘ if you must go, dear. I will not say I am not disappointed ; but if you must go——’

‘ Yes, I must, really,’ he said. ‘ Don't fidget, and don't wait up. There may be a rubber of whist afterwards, and I shall be late.’

‘How easy it is to lie and deceive!’ thought Renée, as, with the same calm, placid smile, she listened to her husband’s excuses. ‘You are going, Frank, to that handsome, fashionable-looking woman? You will dine with her, and spend the evening at her house, while I, with breaking heart, sit here alone, mad almost with jealousy I dare not show.’

Thoughts like these flitted through her mind as she put up her face and kissed him before quietly ringing the bell for her dinner to be served, and going down to the solitary meal.

Her husband came in for a moment to say good-bye, cheerfully, and then she was alone.

It was a hard and a bitter task, but she fulfilled it, sitting there calmly, and partaking of her solitary dinner. It was for his sake, she said, for no servant must dream that they were not happy; all must go on as usual, and some day he would come back repentant to her forgiving arms, won by her patience and long-suffering.

She sat thinking this over and over again later in the drawing-room with a sad smile upon her lips, pitying, but telling herself that she could be strong

enough to fulfil her self-imposed task. Not one word of reproach should be his, only tenderness and kindness always. She was his wife, and would forgive; yes, had already forgiven, and granted him a dispensation for the sins against her that he might commit.

‘Poor Frank, he never loved me as he thought he did; but I shall win him yet,’ she murmured; and then started, for she fancied that she heard a door close.

She saw nothing, though, and paid little heed, for if it was, it might easily be one of the servants in the farther drawing-room, one of the set of three, the third being quite a small boudoir, where she was seated, while the others were only half lit.

She leaned back in her low chair dreaming of the happy days to come, when her husband would return to her, and then her thoughts glided off to Gertrude and her projected marriage.

‘I wonder whether I shall have a child,’ she thought, ‘and if so, whether I shall be, in time to come, as mamma is. Poor Gerty! it seems very shocking that she, too, while caring for another, should be almost forced to accept the addresses of an old man

like Lord Henry Moorpark. For that's what mamma means,' she said half aloud.

Then she sat dreaming on and wondering whether some reports she had heard about John Huish were true—reports of a very dishonourable nature, but which she had carefully hidden from her sister.

'It may be all scandal,' she murmured; 'but I am getting hard now—so soon! ah, so soon! Where there is smoke, they say, there is fire. Poor Gerty! Better Lord Henry—who seems to love her—than that she should waste her days on a worthless man. And yet I liked John Huish. Uncle Robert likes him, too; and I never knew him wrong, in spite of his retired life.'

But it would be strange, she thought, if both she and her sister should have set the affections of their young hearts upon men who upon being tried proved to be unworthy of trust. 'Poor Gerty!—poor me!' she said, half laughing. 'It is a strange world, and perhaps, after all, our parents are right in choosing our partners for life.'

Then she started once more, for she knew that she was not alone, and on turning, there, in evening

dress, his crush hat in his hand, and looking calm, handsome, and sardonic enough for an incarnation of the spirit of evil himself, stood Major Malpas.

‘Nervous, Mrs. Morrison? Good-evening. Did you not hear me announced? No? Your carpets are so soft.’

He almost forced her to hold out her hand to him as she sat up, by extending his own, and he took it and raised it respectfully to his lips.

‘But where is Frank?’ he asked.

‘My husband dines out this evening,’ said Renée coldly.

‘Indeed! how unfortunate! He asked me to run over one evening for a cup of coffee and a cigar. Perhaps he will return soon.’

‘Not till quite late,’ said Renée, who tried hard not to show that she was troubled by the visit.

‘I am so glad to see you better, Renée,’ he said, taking a chair near her, and speaking in a low, earnest voice.

Renée started, for it was the first time since her marriage that he had called her by her name; and as she met his eyes she felt that it was also the first time

since the same event that he had gazed at her with such bold admiration.

What could she do? She could not bid him leave her; and, besides, she felt that in a few minutes his gentlemanly instincts must lead him to go, and, indeed, what was there to fear? He was a gentleman—a friend of her husband—and he had called to see them.

‘How times are changed, Renée!’ he said, after a pause, as he gazed at her pensively. ‘Once your eyes used to brighten and the colour flushed into your cheek when I came near. Now, is it a dream—a trick of fancy? I find you another’s, and you turn from me with coldness.’

‘Major Malpas,’ said Renée quietly, ‘is this a suitable way of addressing the wife of your friend?’

The mask fell off at these words.

‘Friend!’ he cried bitterly, as he drew his chair close to the couch on which she sat; ‘he is no friend of mine. Friend! What, the man who has robbed me of all that was dear—who has made my life a desert! Friend? Renée, you mock me by using such a word.’

‘Major Malpas!’ she cried loudly.

‘Hush!’ he exclaimed, throwing down his hat. ‘Hear me now, for the time has come, and I must speak, even though it be to wound the heart of the tenderest and sweetest of women. Renée, can I call the man friend who deliberately forsakes you for the society of a notorious woman—an actress!’

‘Friend? No,’ cried Renée with flashing eyes, as she rose to ring; but he caught her wrist and stayed her. ‘No; nor he you, if this is your friendship—to come and blacken my husband’s name with foul calumny to his wife.’

‘Stop!’ he said. ‘You shall not ring. Calumny! foul! Is it a foul calumny to say that he was driving her in the Park to-day, that he is dining with her and her friends to-night? Shame, Renée, that you should speak thus to the man who has ever been your faithful slave.’

‘Major Malpas, I insist upon your leaving me this instant. There is the door!’

‘Leave you! No,’ he cried, seizing her other hand, as he fell upon his knees at her feet, ‘not till I have told you, Renée, that the old love never died in my

heart, but has grown up stronger, day by day, till it has mastered my very being.'

That same night there was a party given by Madame Dorinde, limited to eight, fairly balanced between the sexes. The dinner was to be good, the supply of wines very liberal, especially as they cost the hostess nothing.

But they were a curious collection of guests, such as would have puzzled a student of human nature. Certainly he would have understood the status of Madame Dorinde, a handsome, showy woman, with plenty of smart repartee on her lips, and an abundance of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds for neck, arms and fingers—the gifts of the admirers of her histrionic powers. He would have told you that this would be a bright and gay career for a few years, and then probably she would drop out of sight.

There was a pretty, fair girl with good features and the glow of youth on her cheeks, putting to shame the additions of paint, and who seemed to think it right to laugh loudly and boisterously at everything said to her; there was Miss Grace Lister, the first burlesque actress of the day, dark, almost gipsy-looking in her

swarthy complexion, whose colour was heightened by the novelty and excitement of the scene ; Lottie Deloraine, *née* Simpkins, of the Marquise Theatre ; Frank Morrison and a couple of washed-out habitués of the stalls lounged about the room, and the assembled company were beginning to wonder why dinner was not announced.

‘What are we waiting for, Dory?’ said Morrison at last. ‘Aren’t we all here?’

‘Only for an old friend of mine. You know him—John Huish,’ said the hostess rather maliciously ; and then she added to herself, ‘He’ll keep your eyes off Gracy Lister, my gentleman.’

Morrison screwed up his face a little, laughed in a curious way, uttered the ejaculation ‘Oh!’ and then smiled as the door was opened and a smart soubrette loudly announced ‘Mr. John Huish!’ the bearer of that name entering hurriedly, looking flushed and full of apologies, which were at once received and the dinner commenced.

It was intended to be free and easy and full of spirit ; but somehow it seemed as if a spirit of discontent had crept in, and from time to time, though there was no

open unpleasantry, flashes of annoyance played like the summer lightning which prefaces a storm over the table with its sparkling glass.

Madame Dorinde had a great favour to ask of her admirer, Frank Morrison, and sought to put him in the best of humours; but to her great annoyance she found him preoccupied, for his attention had from the first moment been taken up by Grace Lister, and his eyes were being constantly turned in her direction as, after a time, forgetting past troubles and neglect in the gaiety and excitement of the scene, Madame Dorinde looked brighter and more animated than she had seemed for weeks.

All this annoyed Huish, who was not long in detecting the glances directed by Frank Morrison at the glowing beauty of Grace, and he was the more annoyed because, just before dinner, he had whispered to the giver of the feast :

‘Have the cards on the table as soon as you can. You propose.’

‘There will be no cards to-night, my friend, so you need not expect to win any money,’ the hostess had replied; and the young man had bitten his lip, and

sat thinking how he could turn the little party to his own account.

‘Why, I say, Huish,’ Morrison cried gaily, a little later on, ‘what a canting humbug you are! I never thought to meet you at a party like this;’ and he smiled significantly. ‘We always thought you were a kind of saint.’

‘I am—sometimes.’

‘It’s wonderful,’ sneered Morrison.

‘Yes, it is a wonder, my dear fellow; but you set me such an example.’

The two habitués of the stalls nodded to one another their approbation of the retort, and Madame Dorinde, to calm what threatened to be one ebullition with another, called for champagne.

As the dinner went on, the elements of discord began to leaven the party with greater effect, and a calm observer would have felt sure that the evening would not pass away without a quarrel. Morrison slighted his hostess more than once, and a redder spot burned in her cheeks right in the centre of a rather unnatural tint, while Huish, out of sheer bravado, on seeing how Morrison kept trying to draw

Grace into conversation, directed his to Madame Dorinde.

‘By the way, why hasn’t Malpas come?’ said Morrison at last. ‘I expected to see him here with little Merelle.’

‘Better employed, perhaps,’ said Madame Dorinde tartly; and the young girl with the youthful look laughed very heartily.

‘I say, Huish,’ said Morrison at last, on finding that his attentions to Grace were resented by her companion, ‘I shall see little fair somebody tomorrow. You know whom I mean. What tales I might tell!’

‘Tell them, then,’ said Huish sharply; ‘perhaps I shall retort by telling too.’

‘Oh, tut, tut, tut!’ cried Dorinde. ‘Nobody tells tales out of school.’

‘This is not the School for Scandal, then,’ said one of the habitués of the stalls; and the fair young lady laughed again.

‘I say, Dorinde,’ said Morrison at last, rather uneasily, ‘why is not Malpas here?’ and as he spoke he directed a peculiar smile at Grace.

Huish drew his breath hard, but said nothing. He set one of the *menu* cards close to his plate, wrote something on the back, and, waiting his time, doubled it up at last.

‘Give that to the gentleman opposite,’ he whispered to a waiter, slipping a florin into the man’s hand. ‘Don’t say where it came from.’

The man nodded, and Huish turned to chat gaily with Dorinde ; then, filling his glass slowly, he directed a sidelong glance at Morrison as he took the card, glanced at its writing, crushed it up in his hand, and closed his eyes, as a spasm ran through his countenance and he turned pale as death.

No one else noticed it, and he opened his eyes and glanced quickly round to see that the company were all busily conversing. Then, rising quietly, he left the room, walked slowly to the lobby of the great building, where he had left hat and coat, and went out of the house.

Then he let his excitement have its full vent.

‘Hansom!’ he shouted, leaping into the first he saw. ‘Chesham Place—double fare—gallop.’

The horse dashed off in answer to the sharp cut of

the whip, and as it tore along Piccadilly Frank Morrison strove to get rid of the fumes of the wine he had been drinking, and to think calmly.

‘She is too pure and sweet and true a woman—I don’t believe it,’ he said, grinding his teeth. ‘Whom I am cursed scoundrel enough to neglect. Who could have written that? Curse him! that John Huish, of course. What a scoundrel he has turned out!’

‘Bah! what am I railing at?’ he cried. ‘Whom do I call scoundrel? D——n you!’ he roared, forcing up the little trap in the roof of the hansom. ‘Faster, man, faster.’

There was another lash of the whip, and the horse galloped furiously.

‘Scoundrel, indeed! he is no worse scoundrel than I. He is an open roué, while I stoop to all kinds of beggarly petty subterfuges to conceal the life I lead. I won’t believe it, though; it is a malicious trick of John Huish’s because he was jealous—and he has fooled me.’

‘Well,’ he muttered, after a pause, ‘a good thing too. I’m sick of the whole thing—cards, lose, pay,

feast a woman who does not care a *son* for me. Heavens, what a fool I am ! John Huish, you have ousted me ; take my place and welcome. Renée, little woman, I'll come back, and be a good boy now.'

He said this with a mocking laugh, and then changed his position impatiently in the cab, growing, in spite of his words, more excited every moment.

'How could Huish know?' he said, gnawing his nails. 'Impossible ; and, besides, he is too good and tried a friend. Suppose he did drop in, what then ? Why, he is wiser than I : he prefers the society of a sweet good little woman to that of a set of painted animals, who have not a scrap of reputation big enough to make a bow for their false hair.'

'There, I've been tricked !' he exclaimed, as the cab turned down out of Knightsbridge and he neared Chesham Place. 'Never mind ; I'll forgive him for fooling me, and I'll try to leave all this wretched, stupid life behind. We'll go abroad for a bit ; or, no, we'll go yachting—there'll be no temptations there. I'm going to begin afresh. We'll have a new honeymoon, Renée, my little girl. But—but—if that fellow's words were true !'

The gas-lamps seemed to spin round as he stopped the cab, and he leapt out to hastily thrust some money in the driver's hand, and then walked sharply down the Place till he came opposite his own house.

'Curse it—it can't be so!' he groaned, as he saw the dimly-lit drawing-room. 'If it were true, I should go mad or go to the bad altogether. I won't believe it. Malpas, old fellow, I beg your pardon,' he muttered. 'Renée, my child, if heaven will give me strength, I'll confess to you like an honest man that I've been a fool and an idiot, and ask you to forgive me.'

'Yes, and she'll forgive me without a word,' he said, as he opened the door, quickly threw off hat and coat, and ran up the great stone staircase three steps at a time, then, trying to control the agitation that made his heart beat so heavily against his side, he threw open the door, closed it hastily, and walked across the faintly-lit room into the next, where he could see into the little boudoir with its bright furniture, flowers, and graceful hanging-lamp, which shed a softened light through the place.

The next instant he had entered, and was standing there face to face with his wife, who with flushed face stood trembling before him, supporting herself by one hand upon the chimney-piece.

‘Renée,’ he cried, turning white with rage, as his worst suspicions seemed confirmed, ‘what does this mean?’

‘Frank, Frank!’ stretching out her hands towards him as she tottered a couple of steps and then reeled and would have fallen, but he caught her and swung her round on to the couch, where he laid her, and stood gazing down for a few moments.

Then, looking dazed, and trembling in every limb, he turned round, his eyes rested on the curtains which shut off the little conservatory, and with two strides he reached them, tore them aside, and then started away.

It was exactly what he had wound himself up to expect; but his faith in his injured wife was so strong that, as he drew back, he could scarcely believe his eyes, and with a giddy feeling stealing over him, he stood staring wildly at the apparition that he had

unveiled. The blood seemed to swell in a chilling flood to his heart, and for a few moments he could neither speak nor move.

Then with an electric rush it seemed to dart again through every vein in his body, making his nerves tingle, and he flew at the man who had crept like a serpent into his Eden.

‘Devil!’ he cried hoarsely; and he tried to seize his enemy by the throat.

With a deft movement of the arms, though, Malpas struck his hands aside, caught them by the wrist, gave them a dexterous twist, and forced the other, stronger man though he was of the two, upon his knees.

‘Fool! idiot!’ he said, in a low voice. ‘Do you wish to publish it all over Belgravia?’

‘You crawling, deceitful fiend!’ cried Frank Morrison, making a savage effort to free himself, and succeeding so that he closed, and a sharp struggle ensued, which again went against the young husband. For his adversary was an adept in athletic exercises, and taking advantage of a low ottoman being behind, forced him backwards so suddenly that he fell, and in

a moment was down with Malpas's hands in his neck-tie and a knee on his chest.

'Are you mad?' he said, panting and trying to recover his breath; 'what do you want?'

'Your life, you crawling, lying villain,' gasped Morrison.

'Look here, Morrison, be a man of the world,' said Malpas quietly. 'So far, I don't suppose they have heard anything downstairs, so why make a scene? If you wish it, I'll meet you in Belgium; that is,' he added, smiling, 'if you consider that your honour has suffered.'

'You scoundrel!' panted Morrison. 'You have blasted my home!'

'Bah! don't go into high sentiment. Blasted your home? Hang it, man, talk sense! What did you care for your home? Where have you been to-night?'

'Where I pleased,' cried Morrison, with subdued rage in his eyes; but he lowered his voice.

'Exactly, you had your little affair to attend to: why should not madame have her guest by way of solace, in the absence of so true and faithful a husband?'

'You villain!' panted Morrison again, as he caught the wrists that held him down.

'Villain, if you like to use such strong language, *mon cher*; but for heaven's sake be calm—be a man of the world! We don't live in the old, sentimental Darby-and-Joan days, my dear fellow, but in times when it is fashionable to follow one's own sweet will. You are like the dog in the manger: obstinate—selfish—brutal. Go to, my dear friend, and enjoy yourself, but let others live and enjoy themselves too.'

For answer Frank Morrison made a desperate struggle to rise, but he was quite helpless under the strong pressure of his opponent's knee.

'For goodness' sake, be calm,' said Malpas angrily. 'Hang it, man, what did you expect in our matter-of-fact world! You brought me here constantly, and you left us together constantly. Do you forget that we were old lovers before you came between us? There, you are coming to your senses, I hope.'

He stepped away quickly towards the door, and Frank Morrison sprang up and made as if once more

to seize him, but with a violent thrust Malpas sent him backwards and was gone.

Frank Morrison stood motionless till he heard the front door close ; then with a moan of anguish he turned towards where Renée still lay insensible upon the couch.

‘My punishment !’ he groaned ; ‘and I believed in her so thoroughly ; I thought her so pure, so sweet that—out upon me ! I left her, dog that I was, for garbage. Curse him !’ he cried in a paroxysm of rage, ‘curse her, with her smooth, white, innocent looks ! The whole world is blasted with villainy, and there is not one among us worthy of a moment’s faith.’

‘Frank—husband,’ moaned a voice, and Renée, pale as death, rose trembling to clasp her hands before him.

He caught them in his, dragged her up savagely, and then swung her down upon her knees.

‘And you, too, of all women in the world ! Curse you ! curse you ! may you——’

‘Frank, my own, I——’

‘Out upon you !’ he cried. ‘I’ll never look upon your smooth false face again !’

Choking with her emotion, she tried to speak—to cling to him ; but he snatched himself away, and as she fell heavily upon the carpet he rushed from the house.

CHAPTER IV.

LATE IN THE FIELD.

‘WHY, what’s the matter?’

‘Matter!’ panted Dick Millet, dancing excitedly into Marcus Glen’s room, where the latter was sitting back, cigar in mouth, reading the most interesting parts of a sporting paper. ‘Why, everything’s the matter. While you are sitting here at your ease, those two old patriarchs have been stealing a march upon us.’

‘When you get a little less excited,’ said Glen coolly, ‘perhaps you will explain.’

‘Oh, it’s easily explained: those two—that Jew fellow, Elbraham, and that old yellow apricot, Lord Henry Moorpark—have been in at the private apartments this hour.’

‘Visit of ceremony,’ said Glen, sending up a little cloud of smoke.

‘Yes, and then they’ve been walking up and down in the gardens, talking earnestly together.’

‘While you have been in the Maze and got lost,’ said Glen.

‘I tell you they were walking together, and shaking hands in the most affectionate manner.’

‘While you played the spy, Dick? I say, my lad, that’s not square.’

‘But it’s a horrible sell. My mother was always asking those two to our place.’

‘With matrimonial intentions?’

‘I suppose so. Elbraham never came, but old Moorpark often did, and it was on the cards——’

‘Visiting-cards?’

‘No. That he was to be my brother-in-law. I say, Glen, who is a fellow to trust?’

‘But he was not engaged to your sister?’

‘No, of course not. Our Gertrude thought a deal of another fellow; but the mater’s word is law, you see, and it might have come off. Good heavens! she will be mad.’

‘Your sister?’

‘Not she—the mother. Well, I’m not going to stand it. My dear fellow, we are being cut out.’

‘Nonsense, my dear boy ; those two are old enough to be their grandfathers.’

‘But they are rich—at least, Elbraham is rolling in wealth.’

‘Then Lord Henry was getting the Jew to do a bill.’

‘You seem as if nothing would move you, Glen ; I tell you I am sure they have been to propose to those girls.’

‘And if they had, what then?’

‘I should go mad.’

‘Nonsense ! you’d go and fall in love with someone else.’

‘I? with another !’ cried the little fellow tragically. ‘I tell you I never knew what it was to love till now. I can’t bear it, Glen ; pray get up, and come and see.’

‘Nonsense, man, nonsense ! We couldn’t call. Wait till to-morrow, and we shall meet them in the grounds.’

‘You’ll drive me mad with your coolness. You can’t care for her. Oh, Glen, ’pon my soul, it’s too

bad ! I loved Clotilde almost to distraction, but seeing how you seemed to be taken with her, I gave her up to the man I looked upon more as brother than friend, and devoted myself to Marie. If I had known, though, I should have taken up very different ground.'

Glen had felt troubled at his little companion's remarks, and he had begun to think seriously of the possibility of what he had announced being true ; but the tragic manner in which he had spoken of the transfer of his affections in obedience to his friendship was more than Glen could bear, and he burst out into such a hearty fit of laughter that little Richard faced round, and marched pompously and indignantly out of the room.

No sooner had he gone than Glen began to think, and very seriously now. Somehow he seemed to have been stirred by Clotilde from the depths of his ordinary calm life ; he did not know that he loved her, but the thought of her dark, passionate eyes had such an effect upon him that he got up and began to pace the room. Never had woman so moved him from his apathy before ; and the more he thought of her simplicity and daring combined, the

more he told himself that this woman was his fate.

It was plain enough to him, with his knowledge of the world, that he was the first who had ever intruded upon her maiden repose. He knew that she had led an almost conventual life, and that her young heart seemed, as it were, to leap to meet him, so that what would have appeared brazen effrontery in a girl of several seasons, was in her but the natural act of her newly-awakened love.

‘I can’t help it,’ he exclaimed at last ; ‘she is not the sort of girl that I thought I should have chosen to call wife ; but she is all that is innocent and passionate, and, well, I feel sure she loves me, and if she does——’

He stopped short for a few moments, thinking :

‘We shall be as poor as the proverbial church mouse ; but what does that matter, so long as a man finds a wealth of love ?’

He continued his two or three strides backwards and forwards, and then threw himself down in his seat.

‘The girl’s a syren,’ he exclaimed, ‘and she has

bewitched me. Hang me if I ever thought I could feel such a fool !

Glen's folly, as he considered it, increased in intensity like a fever. For years past he had trifled with the complaint—rather laughed at it, in fact ; but now he had it badly, and, with the customary unreason of men in his condition, he saw nothing but perfection in the lady who had made his pulses throb.

Certainly, as far as appearance went, he was right, for nature could have done no more to make her attractive. To what art had made her he was perfectly blind, and, intoxicated by his new delight, he began to think of how he should contrive to see her again.

Glen's mind went faster than his body, which, in spite of energetic promptings, refused to do more than go on in a stolidly calm, well-disciplined way, and the utmost it would accord, when urged by passion to go and loiter about the Palace gardens or the private apartments in the hope of seeing Clotilde, was a stroll slowly towards Hampton.

‘I'm not going to behave like a foolish boy,’ he said to himself. ‘I've tumbled head over ears in love with

her, and if I can read a woman's face she is not indifferent to me. Till I have a chance to say so I must wait patiently in a sensible way. It would be pleasant, though, to walk as far as Lady Littletown's and make a call. The old lady might, perhaps, talk about her, and I should hear a little more.'

He started with the idea of walking straight to Hampton, but he met Major Malpas, who detained him some little time. Then he encountered Maberley, the surgeon, and had to hear an account about one of the corporals who had been kicked by a vicious horse.

The consequence was that he did not get to Lady Littletown's on that day, while the next was pretty well taken up with a march out and other military duties ; but free at last, he hurriedly got rid of his uniform, and once more set off to walk to Hampton.

He had hardly seen Dick Millet since he left his quarters in dudgeon. They had met at the mess dinner, and also during the march out, but the little fellow had held himself aloof, and seemed hurt and annoyed.

'I must have a talk with Master Dick,' said Glen to

himself, as he walked on. ‘He’s a good little fellow at heart, and I don’t like to hurt his feelings.’

He had hardly formed the thought when he heard rapid steps behind, and directly after his name was uttered.

Turning round, there was the boy coming on at as nearly a run as his dignity would allow.

‘I say, old fellow, how fast you do walk! Either your legs are precious long or mine are precious short.’

‘Little of both, perhaps. Take the happy medium, Dick.’

‘Ah, that’s better,’ exclaimed the boy, whose face was now bright and beaming. ‘I do hate to see you in one of those sulky, ill-humoured fits of yours.’

‘Yes, they are objectionable; but where are you going?’

‘Going? I was coming after you. I say, I’ve made it right.’

‘Made what right?’

‘Why, *that*. I hung about till I saw the Dymcoxes’ maid, a regular old griffin; and when I spoke to her she looked as if she would have snapped off my head.

Couldn't make anything of her, but I've secured the footman.'

'Under military arrest?'

'No, no, of course not. You know what I mean. I tipped him a sov., and the fellow seemed to think I had gone mad; then he thought I meant to have given him a shilling, and told me so. I don't believe he hardly knew what a sov. was, and he'd do anything for me now. He'll take letters, or messages, or anything; and he says that I was right.'

'What about?'

'What about? Why, those two ancient patriarchs; and that he is sure the old women are going to make up a match and regularly sell the girls. Glen, old fellow, this must be stopped.'

'How?'

'By proper advances first, and if diplomacy fails, by a dashing charge—an elopement.'

'Humph!' ejaculated Marcus. 'Should you inform Lady Millet, your mamma, before you took such a step?'

'I should take the lady I had chosen for my wife straight home.'

‘And a very good place, too,’ said Glen, who remained very thoughtful, saying little till they reached Lady Littletown’s gates.

‘Are you going to call here?’

‘To be sure. Come with me?’ replied Glen; and receiving an answer in the affirmative to the inquiry as to whether Lady Littletown was at home, they were shown in, to find to their great delight that her ladyship had been over to the Palace that afternoon, and had brought back Clotilde and Marie to dine with her and spend the evening.

‘It will help to form their minds, my dears,’ her ladyship had said to the Honourable Misses Dymcox; ‘and really, now that we have this project in hand, I feel towards them as if they were my own children.’

This was while the young ladies had gone up to dress and frighten Ruth by their exigencies and sharp ways, after which they had an airing in Lady Littletown’s carriage, and, when the young officers were announced, were sipping their five o’clock tea.

‘Now, now, now,’ cried Lady Littletown in tones of playful menace, as she gave her fingers to the officers

in turn, 'I shall not allow this sort of thing. You soldiers are such dreadful men. You knew my poor children here had come over to cheer my solitude, and you mount your chargers and gallop over at once.'

'I can assure your ladyship that my visit was frankly intended to yourself, and that I was in utter ignorance of your having company; but of course I am the more delighted.'

Glen had never delivered so courtly a speech before, and he felt uncomfortable when he had said it; but he recovered directly as he met Clotilde's eyes, which were fixed earnestly upon his, and her hand spoke very plainly as they exchanged salutations; Marie, on the contrary, seeming as cold as her sister was warm.

'Then that dreadful little Don Juan knew of it,' cried her ladyship sharply. 'I shall forbid him the house.'

'I assure your ladyship——' began Dick.

'Eh? What, Edward?' said Lady Littleton, as a servant made a communication to her in a low, respectful tone. 'Dear me, how tiresome! My dears, pray excuse me a minute, I'm called away.'

You can give these dreadful men a cup of tea each if they will condescend to drink it ;' and she rustled out of the room.

'I did not think to have seen you again so soon,' said Dick, crossing to where Marie sat, looking pale and troubled, while Clotilde rose from her seat, looking fixedly at Glen, and walked out into the great conservatory, where, of course, he followed.

Marie turned paler and her breath came faster as she made as if to rise and follow them ; but Dick set down the emotion as being caused by his presence, and catching her hand in both of his, he repeated his words, 'I did not expect to see you again so soon.'

'Let us go,' replied Marie hoarsely. 'My sister ; do you not see ?'

'Yes,' whispered Dick, full of boyish ardour. 'But don't—pray don't go.'

Lady Littleton was very proud of her conservatory, which was kept lavishly filled with the choicest flowers and foliage plants. Following on the example of Hampton Court, there were oranges of goodly size, with their bright-green leaves, yellow fruit

green fruit, and delicious blossoms all growing at the same time.

It was into this semi-tropical region, where the atmosphere was redolent of sweet and cloying perfume, that Clotilde had slowly walked, her eyes dreamy and downcast, and her fingers idling amongst the beautiful blossoms on either side.

As Glen followed, and noted her soft undulating form, her bent head with masses of dark hair clustering about her neck, he felt his heart go throb, throb, heavily and slowly, while his blood seemed to bound through his veins.

Clotilde went on down the central path of the great glass-house, and then, without glancing back, she turned off at the bottom, where she was completely hidden from the drawing-room windows, and it was here that Glen overtook her.

‘Miss Riversley ! Clotilde !’ he said softly.

She did not speak, but he saw her shudder, as if a tremor had run through her frame.

‘Have I offended you ?’ he whispered, holding out his hands.

‘Oh no,’ she cried, starting round with her face

flushed ; and placing her hands in his, she looked up full in his eyes for a moment, and then let them fall.

It was very shocking, very unusual, and it was all entirely opposed to the etiquette of such matters, but there was a something in Clotilde's looks and ways that made Glen turn giddy ; and he behaved giddily. Some people will say it was his fault, some others may blame the lady for her want of reserve, but the fact remains the same, that, forgetting everything in the moment but the look that had spoken so much to his eyes, the young officer pressed his lips to the hand that not only seemed to, but did invite the caress ; but just then there was a sharp ' Oh !' and in an instant Clotilde and Glen were admiring the beauty of the colours in some caladiums of which Lady Littletown was very proud.

The ejaculation was not uttered by that lady, however, but by Marie, who, closely followed by Dick Millet, had come down the conservatory tiles silent as a cat and seen all.

' Clotilde !' she exclaimed in a low, angry voice, and then she darted an imperious look at Glen.

' Well, Marie ?' said Clotilde coolly, as the rich

red slowly died out of her cheeks, 'did you find the drawing-room too warm, love? Look, Captain Glen, this one is lovely.'

'Lovely indeed!' cried Marcus, giving a beseeching glance at Marie; but she turned from him scornfully, only to look back at him with a fierce, passionate gaze which startled and surprised him, for he did not then realize the truth.

There was nothing to be done then but to go on admiring the flowers, and as they went from group to group, Glen's feelings were a strange contradiction. His pulse throbbed with pleasure, but this was marred by the bitterly reproachful look he had received from Marie; while upon catching Dick's eyes fixed upon him, and receiving a half-droll, half-reproving shake of the head from that young gentleman, he felt so angry and annoyed at his having witnessed the scene, that he could have freely kicked him out of the conservatory.

A gorgeous display of blossoms cultivated to the highest pitch of perfection Lady Littleton had gathered together in her conservatory, but these nobles of Flora's train might well have felt offence at the

treatment they received, for, though the occupants of the glass-house babbled and talked flowers, any disinterested listener would have been astonished at the rubbish that was said.

‘Ah, you are admiring my pets,’ cried Lady Littleton, returning hastily; ‘I’m so sorry to have had to leave you, my dears. One of my old pensioners was ill, and had sent on for some wine I promised. Yes, those are my gloxinias, Captain Glen. Delightful, are they not? Did you have some tea? No! Ah, I see how it is. Next time I receive a call at this hour from you military gentlemen, I shall have a pot with two teaspoonfuls of soda in it, and then fill it up with brandy. You would be happy then.’

They stayed very little longer, and when at parting, after receiving a long, earnest pressure from Clotilde’s hand, Glen turned to Marie and took hers, most grudgingly held out, he found time to whisper:

‘Don’t be angry with me; surely we ought to be the best of friends.’

Marie’s heart gave a great throb as she felt the warm pressure of his hand, and in spite of herself she could

not help her eyes lifting to meet his in a gaze that was full of sadness and reproach.

‘Oh, come, I say, Glen, old fellow,’ cried Dick as soon as they were well outside the gates. ‘You do go it, you do! Only just known her.’

‘Hold your tongue, do! Hang it, Millet, there are things a man ought not to see.’

‘Oh, very well, then, I’m as blind as a beetle and as quiet as a fish. I didn’t see anything; but, I say, didn’t it make Marie cross!’

‘Oh, of course. She was surprised.’

‘I tried to keep her in the drawing-room, but she was nervous and frightened—poor little darling!—at being alone with me, and I was obliged to let her come at last, or there would have been a scene.’

There was something very suggestive of a dapper little bantam paying his addresses to a handsome young pullet in the boy’s remarks anent the ‘poor little darling’; but Glen was too much troubled just then to pay much heed, so his companion prattled on.

For Glen was not satisfied: he wished that Clotilde had not been so yielding.

Then he excused her. She was so sweet and innocent. She had been so restrained and kept down ; all was so fresh to her, that her young love, he told himself, was like Haidée's, and like some bird she had flown unhesitatingly to his breast.

It was very delicious, but, all the same, he wished that it was all to come, and that she had been more retiring and reserved.

Still, she loved him. There was no doubt of that, and perceiving that he was dreamy, and strange, and likely to excite notice from his companion, he roused himself from the reverie.

‘ Well, Dick,’ he cried, laughing, ‘ what have you to say now to your story of the patriarchs ?’

‘ Well, I don't know. I suppose it must be all a flam.’

‘ Yes, there's no doubt about that, and you have wasted a sovereign that might have gone in button-holes and gloves.’

‘ Oh, no—not wasted,’ cried the little fellow. ‘ Decidedly not. Oh, no, my dear boy, my experience teaches me that it is always as well in such matters to have a friend at court.’

‘I say, young fellow,’ cried Glen, who had cast off his reserve, and was now making an effort to be merry, ‘you say, “in these affairs”! In the name of common-sense, how many love affairs do you happen to have had?’

‘Well, really,’ said the boy importantly, ‘I don’t exactly know. Somehow or another, I did begin early.’

Glen laughed merrily, and went on chatting away ; but somehow the thoughts of Marie’s reproachful eyes were mingled largely with those of Clotilde’s longing, loving gaze, and there were times when he did not know whether he was most happy or most vexed.

CHAPTER V.

A WALK IN THE GARDENS.

THE days glided on, with the younger sisters wondering at the change that had taken place, for everything now seemed to be done with an idea to their comfort.

Mr. Montaigne called, according to his custom, pretty frequently, and he was quite affectionate in his ways. He and the Honourable Misses Dymcox had long conversations together, after which he used to go, seeming to bless Clotilde and Marie, he was so paternal and gentle—Ruth obtaining, too, her share of his benevolent smiles.

Then, after a good deal of waiting, came a time when Clotilde met Glen alone. The latter did not know that he had Dick to thank for the arrangement ; but he it was who made the suggestion to Clotilde,

by whom the idea was seized at once, and the very next morning she proposed that Marie and she should have a walk in the gardens directly after breakfast.

‘My head aches a good deal, aunties, and a walk will do it good.’

Miss Philippa looked at her sister, and Miss Isabella returned the look.

‘Well, my dears, as it is far too early for anyone to be down from London,’ said Miss Philippa, ‘I think you might go, don’t you, sister?’

‘Yes, decidedly,’ said Miss Isabella; and the young ladies went up to dress, Markes entering the bedroom as they prepared for their walk.

‘But you two ain’t going alone?’ said the maid.

‘Indeed but we are, Markes,’ retorted Clotilde.

‘But not without your aunts?’

‘Yes, of course. How absurd you are!’

‘Well, things is coming to a pretty pass! I couldn’t have believed it if I’d been told.’

She went out, and, according to her custom, slammed the door, but it was not heeded now; and soon after, with the affectionate kisses of their aunts

moist upon their cheeks, the two girls strolled along one of the paths in the direction of the Lion Gate.

For a time they were very silent, but at last, after two or three sidelong glances at Marie, Clotilde opened the ball.

‘Well, dear,’ she said, ‘what do you think of it?’

Marie remained silent.

‘For my part,’ continued Clotilde, ‘I think it horrible. It’s like being sold into a seraglio. I won’t have him.’

‘Then why did you accept that bracelet?’ exclaimed Marie sharply.

‘Because it was very beautiful, my dear sister ; because I only had a wretchedly common *porte bonheur* ; and, lastly, because it was of diamonds, and I liked it.’

‘But it was like telling the man you would have him.’

‘Then why did you accept that pearl ring Lord Henry sent you, sweet sissy?’

‘For the same reason—because I liked it,’ said Marie bitterly ; ‘but I’ve hated myself ever since.’

‘It’s a pity they are so old,’ said Clotilde. ‘It would be very nice if they were not, for I like the

idea of having plenty of good things, and being able to spend as much money as I like. Why, Rie,' she exclaimed, 'let's have a run through the Maze. We haven't been since we were quite little children.'

'Nonsense ! absurd !'

'Never mind ; let's be absurd for once. There will be no one there so soon as this. I shall go ; you can stay away if you like.'

With a quiet, disdainful look, Marie followed her sister, and carelessly began with her threading the devious course through the quaint old labyrinth.

'How ridiculous of you, Clo!' she said at last. 'There is not a breath of air, and it is growing terribly hot. Come back, there is someone here.'

'Very well ; come back, then,' said Clotilde. 'This way, Rie.'

'No ; that is not the path.'

'Yes it is. I'm sure it is ; and—oh, how strange ! Here are those two.'

Marie's cheeks crimsoned as she found that they had come suddenly upon the two officers. That it was a planned thing she was sure ; but this was not the time to resent it, and she returned the salutations

with which she was greeted, making up her mind that she would keep close to Clotilde the whole time, and prevent a *tête-à-tête*.

But such a determination would have been difficult to carry out in the gardens, when three people were arrayed dead against her. In a maze it was simply impossible ; and the guide was not there.

She never knew how or when they were separated, but all at once she and Dick were on one side of a hedge, and Clotilde and Glen on the other, and when the boy laughingly tried to put matters right, he did it so cleverly that they were soon two hedges separate ; then three, and likely to be four ; by which time, forgetful of all his scrupulous feelings, and Clotilde's want of perfection in his eyes, Glen had clasped her to his heart with a deep, low 'My darling, at last !'

'Oh, no, no, no, Marcus,' she sobbed, as she gently thrust him away, and then clung to his arm, gazing piteously up at him the while. 'You must not. I ought not to let you. I feel so wicked and despairing I hardly care to live.'

'But why, my darling—my beautiful darling?' he

whispered passionately, contenting himself now with holding her hands.

‘Because this is so wrong. My aunts would never forgive me if they knew.’

‘That is what I want to speak about, dearest,’ he said, in a low voice, as he drew her arm through his and they walked on. ‘May I speak to them? Let me call and ask their permission to come freely and openly to the apartments. I am only a poor suitor, Clotilde—only a captain of cavalry, with very little beside his pay; but you will not despise me for that?’

‘For what?’ she cried innocently, as she gazed up into his face.

‘For my want of money,’ he said, smiling down, and longing to clasp her once more in his arms.

‘I hardly know what money is,’ she said quietly. ‘We have never had any; so why should I care for that?’

‘Then I may speak?’ he whispered. ‘I may be better off by-and-by, and we can wait.’

‘Oh yes, we could wait,’ sighed Clotilde. ‘But no—no—no, it is madness! I ought not to talk like

this. I've been very weak and foolish, and I don't know what you must think of me.'

'Think of you !' he whispered ; ' that you are all that is beautiful and innocent and good, and that I love you with all my heart.'

' But I'm not good,' faltered Clotilde ; ' I'm very wicked indeed, and I don't know what will become of me ; I don't, really.'

' Become the woman who will share my fate—the woman I shall make my idol. Clotilde, I never saw one I could sincerely say such things to till we met, and at one bound my heart seemed to go out to meet you. Tell me, my darling, that nothing shall separate us now.'

' Oh, don't, pray don't speak to me like that,' sighed Clotilde. ' You don't know—you can't know. What shall I do?'

' My dear girl, tell me,' he whispered, as he gazed in her wild eyes.

' Oh, no, no !' she sobbed.

' Not give your confidence to one who loves you as I do?'

' I dare not tell you—yes, I will,' she cried piteously.

‘What shall I do? My aunts say that I must marry Mr. Elbraham.’

‘Then Millet was right,’ cried Glen excitedly. ‘But no, no, my darling, it cannot—it shall not be. Only tell me you love me—that I may care for you—guard you—defend you, and no aunts or Elbrahams in the world shall separate us.’

‘I—I think—I believe I do care for you,’ she faltered, as she looked up at him in a piteous, pleading way.

‘Heaven bless you, sweet!’ he cried. ‘Then this very day I will see them. They are women, and will listen to reason. I will plead to them, and you shall help me.’

‘Oh, no, no, no!’ cried Clotilde in horrified tones. ‘That would be to separate us for ever, and—and—and,’ she sobbed, ‘I could not bear that.’

‘But surely——’ he began.

‘Oh, you do not know my aunts!’ she said excitedly. ‘It would only be to force me into that dreadful man’s arms. We must not let them know. It would be too dreadful.’

‘But, my darling, I think I could show them——’

‘No, no! Don’t show them—don’t try to show them, if you love me!’

‘If I love you!’ he said reproachfully.

‘Then pray—pray keep it secret,’ she said imploringly, ‘for the present.’

‘But I must see you—I must talk to you.’

‘Yes, yes; you shall sometimes. But if they thought you spoke to me as you have, I should never see you again.’

‘But what am I to do?’ he pleaded.

‘You may write to me sometimes,’ she said ingenuously; ‘and sometimes, perhaps, we may meet.’

‘But——’

‘Hush! No more now. Oh, pray—pray—pray! Here is sister Marie.’

Glen did not notice it, but Clotilde recovered her calmness very rapidly, as, after a very awkward time spent in trying hard to keep her from joining the others, Marie found out the way for herself, and snubbed Dick so sharply that he came up with her looking exceedingly rueful, and telling himself that the sacrifice he had made to friendship was far

too great, and that he ought to have kept to Clotilde.

‘Why, Marie,’ exclaimed the latter, ‘where have you been?’

Marie did not reply, only darted an angry glance at her sister, and then one full of scorn at Glen, who made a sign to Millet, one which the little fellow eagerly obeyed, going on with Clotilde, while Glen lingered behind with Marie.

‘I am not so blind or so foolish as not to see that you are displeased with my attentions to your sister,’ he said in a low voice, which made her thrill with pleasure, in spite of the jealous anger she felt. ‘Yes, you need not tell me,’ he continued, meeting her eyes. ‘But come, let us be friends—more, let us be like brother and sister, for, believe me, my feelings towards you are warmer than you think. I know that I am no worthy match for your sister, but if love can make up for poverty—there, you will not be angry with me, for I want you to be my ally.’

Marie turned to him again to look scorn and anger, but as she met his eyes her resolution failed, and it

was all she could do to keep from bursting into a passionate fit of sobbing.

‘He loves her,’ she sobbed to herself; ‘and he cannot see her, he cannot know her, as I do.’

The next moment she was upbraiding herself with her own unworthiness, while he was interpreting her silence into a more softened feeling towards him; and when they parted a few minutes later, and he pressed her hand, Marie felt that if he wished it she could become his slave, while somehow Glen did not feel quite satisfied with his idol.

The sisters did not speak on their way back, while when they re-entered the Palace their aunts were loud in praise of the animation their walk had imparted to their countenances.

‘Such news, my dears!’ cried Miss Philippa.

‘Such good news, my dears!’ echoed Miss Isabella.

‘Mr. Elbraham is coming down to-day,’ said Miss Philippa.

‘And he will drive Lord Henry Moorpark down in his phaeton.’

‘Yes, my sweet darlings,’ said Miss Philippa

affectionately. 'I think, dears, I would sit quietly in the drawing-room all the morning.'

'And go up just before lunch to dress.'

'Yes, dears. Your new morning dresses have come home.'

'Oh, have they, aunt dear?' cried Clotilde. 'Come upstairs, then, at once, Rie, and we'll try them on.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANCHORITE IS CONSULTED AGAIN.

‘I WONDER whether I shall ever have any children of my own,’ said John Huish ; ‘and, if I do, whether I shall ever be so hard, cruel, and worldly to them as some people are. Money is very nice, and one would like to see one’s young folks well off ; but how a mother and father can deliberately match a beautiful, innocent young girl with some old fellow because he is rich and has a title, is something beyond my comprehension. Sixty and twenty ! Oh, it is a disgrace to our boasted civilization !’

John Huish’s breakfast was on the table in his snug room, and the coffee, French rolls, and delicately-brown ham looked enticing, but they did not tempt him. He had made several beginnings, such

as taking off the cover that concealed the ham, opening his napkin, pouring out the steaming amber coffee, and the like ; but he had touched nothing, for a letter he had received from Gertrude that morning had taken away his appetite.

‘Poor girl!’ he mused ; ‘suffering agonies, and I seem as if I can do nothing to help her. Money ! Why have I not plenty of money ? I always felt well enough off till this happened, and then all at once I discovered that I was a poor man.’

He wrinkled up his brow, and let his cheek down upon his hand, with his elbow in dangerous proximity to his coffee.

‘I was dreaming of going up to Stonor’s again last night. Good heavens ! Is it likely that I shall ever become like one of those poor fellows—unhinged, doing all kinds of things involuntarily ? There must be something wrong with me ; only Stonor spoke as he did, like all doctors do, to take one’s thoughts away from one’s malady. It is so strange, that perhaps I ought not to think any more of my poor darling ; only Stonor encouraged me so. It would

be a sin against her to marry if I really am wrong. But am I? Let me think.

‘Robson, for some reason, cut me dead yesterday ; but then he is one of Lady Millet’s intimates. Then Rock Anderson apologised for not paying me that money. What money? I remember no debt. It’s softening of the brain, that’s what it is—memory gradually going ; and yet I think of Gertrude and dare—— Well, the doctor said I was all right ; he ought to know. He said it was only a lapse of memory now and then.

‘But there are so many things which are so puzzling. Friends seem to be dropping away from me. Man after man with whom I used to be intimate cuts me dead.

‘No, no, no!’ he cried impatiently ; ‘I will not think of it. And as to that woman who came to me and made me worry my brains, it must have been some town trick.’

But the cloud hung over him still, various little matters connected with his daily life clinging together like snowflakes from that cloud, till the recollection of his position with regard to Gertrude came back,

and her face shone through the darkness to dissipate the mental mist.

‘Yes,’ he cried, brightening up; ‘the doctor must be right. He encouraged me in my ideas; and my darling will keep away all these wretched morbid fancies. But what am I to do?’

‘Act!’ he cried sharply; ‘act!—not sit down here like a morbid, dreamy fool, and let that old woman have her way in making two people wretched for life. I’ll go to Captain Millet’s and see him. Not so easy, though,’ he said, laughing. ‘Never mind; I’ll go. He must have plenty of influence. Oh, of course; and if he fails, why, there’s the doctor. Hang it! he might interfere, and put in a certificate saying that it would be the death of the poor girl if she is forced into a wedding with that fellow. But the old man told me to—— Oh, what a hesitating fool I am!’

Meanwhile, matters were progressing in no very pleasant way at the Millet’s. Renée made no confidant of her mother, but clung to her sister, from whom Lady Millet heard a portion of the trouble that had fallen upon her child.

‘There, I can’t help it,’ said her ladyship. ‘I do

everything I can for you children, and if matters go wrong through your own imprudence, you must put up with the consequences. There, there, it is a silly young married couple's piece of quarrelling, and they must make it up as fast as they can.'

'But, mamma!' said Gertrude.

'Don't argue with me, Gertrude. Renée must have been imprudent, and she must take the consequences. She had no business to encourage Major Malpas to visit her; and I trust that this will be a warning to you when you are married.'

'Mamma!'

'Oh yes, I understand you, Gertrude,' said her ladyship; 'but I know your obstinacy, and I maintain that it would be utter madness for you to see that man after your marriage.'

'But, mamma, you would not think of pressing on that affair now Renée is in such trouble.'

'What has that to do with it, child? What has Renée's trouble to do with your marriage? Lord Henry has been put off long enough. I wish you to accept him; and I am convinced that a word, even a look, would make him propose.'

‘Oh, mamma !’

‘Gertrude, I insist ! I know he likes you, and if he is to be kept back like this, a scheming woman will secure him for some creature or another. Why, it is nearly a month since he called, and no wonder, after your icy conduct ! I shall take steps at once. Let me see, a dinner-party will be best. There, I’m going out ; I’ll resume the subject on my return.’

‘Oh, mamma, mamma !’ cried Gertrude as soon as she was alone. ‘But I will not ; I’d sooner die.’

Lady Millet was put off from resuming the subject on her return, and during her absence Gertrude had relieved her troubled heart by writing a letter of no small importance to herself.

Next day she was driven to Chesham Place with Lady Millet, who left her there while her ladyship went to attend to some shopping.

‘Not been back ?’ said Gertrude eagerly, as she gazed in her sister’s pale face.

‘No, Gertrude, not yet,’ replied Renée ; ‘but he will come soon, I hope,’ she continued, with a sigh full of resignation ; ‘I am waiting. And now about your troubles. Is this affair to take place ?’

‘So mamma says,’ replied Gertrude, with a bitter smile. ‘Like you, I am to have an establishment.’

‘Oh, Gertrude, sister!’ whispered Renée, kissing her. ‘But it makes it less bitter, now that Mr. Huish has proved to be——’

Gertrude laid her hand upon her lips.

‘Hush, Renée!’ she cried. ‘I do not know what you may have heard, and I will not listen to it. Neither will I sit and hear a word against Mr. Huish.’

‘I will not speak against him, dear,’ said Renée sadly; and she gazed piteously in her sister’s eyes.

‘And you, Renée? My poor darling! your position gives me the heartache.’

‘I shall wait, Gertrude. Some day he will find out my innocence and return to ask my pardon. I can wait till then. You see, dear, that, like you, I have faith, and can abide my time.’

In place of returning home, Gertrude persuaded her sister to accompany her to her uncle’s, where Vidler admitted them both directly, and showed them up to the darkened drawing-room.

It was a curious change from the bright sunshine of the street to the gloom within ; but it seemed to accord well with the sadness in the sisters' breasts, and they sat and talked to the old man, playing to him as well, till it drew near the time for them to return to their respective homes.

All this time the pale, almost ghostly-looking hand was playing about in the little opening, and indicating by its nervous action that something was passing in the ordinarily calm mind of its owner.

'Renée, my child,' he said at last, 'I can hear that you are in trouble.'

There was no reply for a few moments, and then she said softly : 'Yes, dear uncle.'

'I do not ask you for your confidence,' he said, 'for if it is some trouble between you and your husband it should be sacred. I dreaded this,' he muttered to himself. 'Gertrude, my child, I would not, if I could help it, do anything to encourage you to act in disobedience to your parents' wishes, but be careful how you enter on this proposed alliance. I like it not, I like it not.'

Gertrude did not answer, only stole to the opening,

and pressed her warm fresh lips to the cold white hand. Then the young people took their leave, and the yellow-looking house in Wimpole Street resumed its wonted aspect of gloom.

CHAPTER VII.

BROUGHT TO A DOUBLE HEAD.

‘AH, my dearest boy!’ cried Lady Millet, an evening or two later; ‘I did not expect you.’

‘’Spose not,’ said Dick shortly; ‘but I’ve come, all the same.’

‘You want money, sir, I suppose; and I will not have papa worried.’

‘No, I don’t want money. I’ve come up on particular business.’

‘Business! Great heavens, my dear child! what is the matter?’

‘Well, I don’t know yet. But, I say, is Gertrude going to marry John Huish?’

‘Certainly not—impossible! I have other views for your sister.’

‘And what are they?’

‘This is a subject I should discuss with your papa, Richard; but you are a man grown now, and I am sorry to say papa does not afford me the support I should like, so I will tell you in confidence. I believe Lord Henry Moorpark will propose directly.’

‘Do you? I don’t.’

‘What do you mean, Dick?’ cried her ladyship sharply.

‘That’s what has brought me up to town. Lady Littleton has been stealing a march on you, and is trying to egg him on to propose elsewhere.’

‘The wretched scheming creature! Oh! No, no, it is impossible. You are mistaken, my boy.’

‘Oh no, I’m not. The old chap is quite on there at Hampton Court. But of course he has no chance.’

‘Stop! At Hampton Court? Who is the lady?’

‘One of the Miss Dymcoxes’ nieces, living with her aunts in the Palace.’

‘Philippa Dymcox’s niece?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not a Miss Riversley?’

‘That’s the name, mamma.’

‘How horrible!—Riversleys! Why, they are connected with the Huishes. That Mr. John Huish’s father married a Miss Riversley.’

‘Very likely,’ said Dick Millet coolly. ‘That’s the lady, all the same—Miss Dymcox’s niece.’

‘The Dymcoxes! the paupers! Lady Littletown’s doing! Oh, that woman!’

‘You don’t like her, then, mamma?’

‘Like her? Ugh!’ exclaimed Lady Millet in tones of disgust; ‘I can soon put a stop to that, my son.’ Her ladyship compressed her lips. ‘But it is all Gertrude’s fault, behaving so ridiculously about that John Huish. I don’t know what she may not have said to Lord Henry the other night. He was almost at her feet, and now he shall be quite. John Huish indeed!—a man going hopelessly to the bad.’ Her ladyship rang. ‘There is no time to be lost. I must act at once. Lord Henry Moorpark must be brought back to his allegiance. Send Miss Gertrude’s maid to ask her to step down here,’ continued her ladyship to the servant who answered the bell.

‘What are you going to do?’

‘Arrange for invitations to be sent out at once.’

Oh, Dick, my boy, the stories I have heard lately about Mr. Huish's gambling and dissipation are terrible ! Gertrude has had a marvellous escape. It is very shocking, for your uncle and father have known the Huishes all their lives. Well ?

‘ Richards says, my lady, that Miss Millet went out an hour ago.’

‘ Out ? Gone out ?’

‘ Yes, my lady ; and Richards found this note left on the dressing-table, my lady, stuck down on the cushion with a pin.’

‘ Great heavens !’ cried Lady Millet, snatching the note from a salver ; ‘ there, leave the room.’

The man bowed and moved to the door, in time to open it for Sir Humphrey, who stood beaming at his son, while her ladyship tore open the letter and read :

‘ DEAR MAMMA,—*I cannot marry Lord Henry Moorpark. Good-bye.*’

‘ That's all !’ cried her ladyship in a perfect wail. ‘ What does it mean ?’

‘ Looks suspicious,’ said Dick. ‘ Hullo !’ he con-

tinued, as the servant reopened the door. 'Can't see visitors.'

'Mr. Frank Morrison, sir,' said the man, who looked rather scared at seeing her ladyship sink upon a couch, where Sir Humphrey began to fan her.

'What the deuce does he want?' grumbled Dick. 'Hullo, Frank! I was coming to see you about that row with our Renée. Gertrude wrote and told me.'

'My wife here?' said Morrison, who was a good deal excited by wine.

'What, Renée? No!'

'D——n!' cried the young husband, dropping upon a chair, and looking from one to the other.

'Something fresh, then?' cried Dick, growing excited. 'Here, why the devil don't you speak, man?'

'Yes, yes! why don't you speak?' cried Lady Millet piteously. 'Oh, Frank dear, what news? Have you seen Gertrude?'

'No,' he said thickly. 'I want Renée.'

'Where is she? Speak, I conjure you!' cried her ladyship.

'Don't know,' said Morrison, glancing round.

‘ Haven’t been home for days. Went home this afternoon. Had some words and came away again.’

‘ Well, well, go on ! I saw you playing billiards at the club.’

‘ Yes,’ said Morrison, whose brain was clouded with days of excess. ‘ Went home again just now. Going to make it up, and she’d gone. Where is she ? Want her directly.’

Dick stood thinking for a few moments, while her ladyship looked at him as if imploring him to speak.

‘ She’s in it, p’raps,’ he said. ‘ Look here, Frank, can you understand me, or have you got D.T. too bad ?’

‘ Yes, I understand,’ said the young man thickly.

‘ Gertrude’s gone away. We think your wife must be in the plot.’

‘ No,’ said Morrison slowly, as he gave his head a shake to clear it, and stood up angry and fierce, while the others hung upon his words as being likely to dispel their fears. ‘ No, poor girl ! too much trouble. I’m a villain,’ he groaned, ‘ and I struck her to-night ; but—but,’ he cried excitedly, ‘ she deceived me. Gone with Malpas. She’s false as hell !’

‘It’s a lie!’ cried Dick fiercely. ‘Here, father, see to my mother. It’s a lie, I say; and you, Frank Morrison, you’re a cad to dare to—— Ah!’ said the lad, uttering a shrill cry, and he had just time to drive up a pistol as it exploded, and save his brother-in-law’s brains from being scattered on the wall.

Then there was a fierce struggle, as Frank Morrison strove to direct the revolver at his temples once more, and Dick fought with him bravely till overpowered; but two of the frightened servants ran in, and with their help the madman was secured and held down till the arrival of the nearest doctor, a messenger having been also sent for Dr. Stonor, who arrived a couple of hours later; and between them the excitement of the would-be suicide was somewhat allayed, though he was still half mad.

It was the old story—days and days of heavy use of stimulants, till the fevered madness that generally comes in its wake had seized upon an already too excited brain; and it was only by the use of the strongest measures that the medical men were able to restrain their patient’s violence, as he rambled on wildly hour after hour, the burden of his incoherent mutterings being, ‘My wife! my wife!’

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK MILLET FEELS GROWN UP.

‘BAD?’ said Dr. Stonor, when he was left alone to attend his patient at Sir Humphrey’s. ‘Yes, of course he is bad—very bad. But I don’t call this illness. He must suffer. Men who drink always do.’

‘But her ladyship, Stonor?’ said Sir Humphrey; ‘will you come and see her now?’

‘No,’ said the doctor roughly. ‘What for? Nothing the matter. She can cure herself whenever she likes. What are you going to do about your sister, soldier boy?’

‘I—I don’t know,’ replied Dick. ‘Ought I to fetch her back?’

‘Yes—no—can’t say,’ said the doctor. ‘Hang this man, how strong he is! Look here, Dick, my boy :

here's a lesson for you. You will be a man some day. When you are, don't go and poison yourself with drink till your brain revolts and sets up a government of its own. Look at this: the man's as mad as a hatter, and I shall have to nearly poison him with strong drugs to calm him down. A wild revolutionary government, with death and destruction running riot. Think your sister has gone with John Huish ?'

'I'm afraid so,' said Dick, for Sir Humphrey seemed utterly unnerved.

'Don't see anything to be afraid of, boy. John Huish is a gentleman.'

'I'm afraid not,' said Dick hotly; 'and it isn't gentlemanly to act as he has done about my sister.'

'I shall have to get a strait-waistcoat for this fellow. About your sister. Bah! Human nature. Wait till you get old enough to fall in love, and some lady—mamma, say—wants to marry your pretty little Psyche to an old man. How then, my young Cupid ?'

Dick changed colour like a girl.

'I hold to John Huish being a thorough gentleman,

my boy. He's all right. I wish Renée's husband was as good a man. Yes, I mean you—you drunken, mad idiot! I'm going to bring you round, and when I've done so, I hope, Dick, if he ever dares to say a word again about your sister Renée——'

'You've heard then?'

'Heard? Of course. Doctors hear and know everything. Parson's nowhere beside a doctor. People don't tell the parson all the truth: they always keep a little bit back. They tell the doctor all because they know he can see right through them. Lie still, stupid. Ha! he's calming down.'

'Isn't he worse, Stonor?' asked Sir Humphrey.

'No; not a bit. And as I was saying, if, when he gets on his legs again, he dares to say a word against his wife, knock him down. I'll make him so weak it will be quite easy.'

'Well, he deserves it,' said Dick.

'Of course he does. So do you, for thinking ill of your sister. I'll be bound to say, if you sent to Wimpole Street, you'd find the poor girls there soaking pocket-handkerchiefs.'

'By Jove! yes,' cried Dick, starting at the doctor's

suggestion. 'Why, of course. Doctor, you've hit it! Depend upon it, they're gone to Uncle Robert's, father.'

'Think so, my boy, eh?—think so?' said the old gentleman. 'It would be very dull and gloomy.'

'Nonsense!' said the doctor. 'My dear boy, the more I think of it, the more likely it seems to me that they have gone there.'

'Yes; that's it, doctor. Guv'nor, I don't like to be hard on you, but the doctor's a very old friend. It's a nice thing— isn't it?—that our girls should have to go to Uncle Robert's for the protection they cannot find here?'

'Yes, my dear boy, it is, it is,' said the old man querulously; 'but I can't help it. Her ladyship took the reins as soon as we were married, and she's held them very tightly ever since.'

'Well, we'll go and see. You'll stay with Frank Morrison, doctor?'

'Stay, sir? Yes, I will. Think I'm going to be dragged down here from Highgate for nothing? I'll make Master Morrison play the shoddy-devil in his

Yorkshire mill for something. He shall have such a bill as shall astonish him.'

'Here, fetch a cab,' shouted Dick to the man who answered the bell; and soon after the jangling vehicle was taking them to Wimpole Street.

It was four o'clock, and broad daylight, as the cab drew up at Captain Millet's door, when, in answer to a ring which Dick expected it would take half an hour to get attended to, the door was opened directly by Vidler.

'You were expecting us, then?' said Dick, as the little man put his head on one side, and glanced from the young officer to his father, and back again.

'Yes, sir. Master said you might come at any time, so I sat up.'

'All right, father; they're here. What time did they come, Vidler?'

'They, sir?'

'Yes—my sisters,' said Dick impatiently. 'What time did they come?'

'Miss Renée came here about half-past ten, sir.'

'There, dad,' whispered Dick. 'And Frank swore

she'd gone off with Malpas. I knew it wasn't true. He wouldn't insult a brother officer like that.'

'I'm very glad, my boy—I'm very glad,' said Sir Humphrey feebly; and Dick turned to Vidler again.

'And Miss Gertrude, what time did she get here?'

'Miss Gertrude, sir?'

'Don't be a stupid old idiot!' cried Dick excitedly. 'I say—what—time—did—my—sister—Gertrude—get here?'

'She has not been here, sir,' replied the little man—'not to-night.'

Dick looked blankly at his father, and, in spite of his determination not to believe the story suggested about his sister, it seemed to try and force itself upon his brain.

'Where is Mrs. Morrison?' he cried at last.

'Lying down, sir. Salome is watching by her. She seemed in great distress, sir, and,' he added in a whisper, 'we think master came out of his room and went to her when we had gone down.'

'Poor Robert!' muttered Sir Humphrey.

'Master's very much distressed about her, gentlemen. Miss Renée is a very great favourite of his.'

‘Is my uncle awake, do you think?’

‘I think so, sir,’ was the reply.

‘Ask him if he will say a few words to my father and me. Tell him we are in great trouble.’

The little man bowed and went upstairs, returning at the end of a minute or two to request them to walk up.

‘Last time I was here,’ thought Dick, ‘I asked him for a couple of tenners, and he told me never to come near him again. A stingy old hunk! But, there, he’s kind to the girls.’

The little panel opened as Vidler closed the door, and Sir Humphrey, looking very old, and gray of hair and face, sat looking at it, leaving his son to open the conversation.

‘Well, Humphrey, what is it?’ said the voice behind the wainscoting.

‘How do you do, Bob?’ began the old gentleman. ‘I—I—Richard, my boy, tell your uncle; I’m too weak and upset.’

‘We’re in great trouble, uncle,’ began Dick sharply.

‘Yes, I know,’ said the voice. ‘Renée has fled to

me for protection from her husband. You did well amongst you. Poor child !

‘Hang it all, uncle, don’t talk like that!’ cried Dick impetuously. ‘You ought to know that we had nothing to do with it. Help us; don’t scold us.’

‘I am helping you,’ said the Captain. ‘Renée stays here with me till she can be sure of a happy home. And, look here,’ he continued, growing in firmness, ‘she has told me everything. If you are a man, you will call out anyone who dares say a word against her fame.’

‘It’s all very well, uncle,’ said Dick; ‘but this is 18—, and not your young days. No one has a word to say against Renée. But look here, uncle, that isn’t all. Gertrude has gone off.’

‘With John Huish, of course. Ah, Humphrey, how strangely Fate works her ways!’

‘But, uncle, they say John Huish has turned out an utter swindler and scamp. Last thing I heard was that he had been expelled from his club.’

‘Let them talk,’ said Captain Millet quietly. ‘I say it cannot be true.’

‘But, Bob,’ faltered Sir Humphrey weakly, ‘they do make out a very bad case against him.’

‘Then you and your boy can take up the cudgels on his behalf. He is son and brother now. There, I am weary. Go.’

‘But Renée—we must see her.’

‘No; let the poor girl rest. When you can find her a decent home, if she wishes it, she can come.’

The little wicket was closed with a sharp snap, and father and son gazed at each other in the gloomy room.

‘Come back home, Dick,’ said Sir Humphrey feebly. ‘And take warning, my boy: be a bachelor. Ladies in every shape and form are a great mistake.’

Dick Millet thought of the glowing charms of Clotilde and Marie Dymcox, but he said nothing, only hinted to his father that he ought to give Vidler a sovereign; and this done, they went back into the cab.

Half an hour later they were back in the room where Frank Morrison lay talking wildly in a loud, husky voice.

‘Oh, well, so much the better,’ said the doctor, when

he heard all. ‘Capital calming place for your sister at your uncle’s. And as for Gertrude—bless her sweet face!—your uncle must be right. Bet a guinea he knew beforehand. I wish her and John Huish joy, he’ll never make her leave her home, and drink himself into such a state as this.’

‘I hope not,’ thought Dick; but just then some of the ugly rumours he had heard crossed his mind, and he had his doubts.

‘Precious hard on a fellow,’ he said to himself, ‘two sisters going off like that! I wonder what Glen and the other fellows will say. Suppose fate forced me to do something of the same kind!’

CHAPTER IX.

GOING TO COURT.

MARCUS GLEN was not a man given to deep thinking, but one of those straightforward, trusting fellows who, when once he placed faith in another, gave his whole blind confidence, and whom it was difficult afterwards to shake in his belief. He had had his flirtations here and there where his regiment had been stationed, and fancied himself deeply in love ; been jilted in a fashionable way, smoked a cigar over it, and enjoyed his meals at the mess as usual. But he had found in Clotilde one so different to the insipid girls of former acquaintance : she was far more innocent in most things, thoroughly unworldly, and at the same time so full of loving passion, giving herself, as it were, to his arms with a full trust and faith, that his pulses

had been thoroughly stirred. She told him of her past, and he soon found out for himself that hers had been no life of seasons, with half a dozen admirers in each. He was her first lover, and he told himself—doubtingly—that she was the first woman, and would be the only one, he could ever love.

Their meetings became few and seldom, and were nearly all of a stolen nature, for there could be no disguising the fact that when the young officer called the Honourable Philippa Dymcox was cold and stately ; and though her sister seemed to nervously desire to further Glen's wishes, she stood too much in awe of her sister, and with a sigh forebore.

Dick Millet then had to put his plan in force, and Joseph began to grow comparatively wealthy with the weight of the Queen's heads that accompanied the notes he bore to the young ladies, and visions of the lodging-house he meant some day to take grew clearer and less hazy in the distance that they had formerly seemed to occupy.

Visits were paid to Lady Littletown's, and that dame was quite affectionate in her ways, but Clotilde and Marie were rarely encountered there ; and when

fortune did favour Glen to the extent of a meeting, there were no more inspections of her ladyship's exotics, no encounters alone, for Lady Littleton was always present; and at last Glen felt that, if he wished to win, it must be by extraordinary, and not by ordinary means.

The slightest hint of this seemed to set Dick on fire.

'To be sure,' he cried; 'the very thing! We must carry them off, Glen, dear boy. Like you know who.'

'And do you think our friend Marie will consent to be carried off?'

'Well—er—yes; I dare say she would oppose it at first, but the moment she feels certain that her aunts mean to force her into a marriage with old Moorpark, I feel sure that she will yield.'

'Ah, well,' said Glen, 'we shall see; but look here, most chivalrous of youths, and greatest among lovers of romance——'

'Oh, I say, how I do hate it when you take up that horrible chaffing tone!'

'Chaff, my dear boy? No, no, this is sound common-

sense ! I do not say that under certain circumstances I might not have a brougham in waiting, and say to a lady, "Here is the license, let us be driven straight to the church and made one ;" but believe me, my dear Dick, all those romantic, elopement-loving days are gone by. We have grown too matter-of-fact now.'

'Hang matter-of-fact ! I mean to let nothing stand in my way, so I tell you ! But, I say, have you heard ?'

'About your sisters ? Yes.'

'Hang it, no !' cried Dick angrily ; 'let that rest. It's bad enough meeting Black Malpas at the mess-table, and being kept back by etiquette from hurling knives. I mean about the dinner.'

'What dinner ?'

'Dymcoxes'. And we're not asked. Our dinner's cold shoulder.'

'A dinner-party ?'

'Yes ; and those two old buffers are to be there.'

Dick was right, for a dinner was given in the private apartments, where the ladies did their best ; but it certainly was not a success, and Marie could

not help bitterly contrasting the difference between the repast and its surroundings and that given by Lady Littletown. For the Honourable Misses Dymcox had been unfortunate in the purveyor to whom they had applied to furnish the dinner and all the necessities. All the linen, the plate, the glass, and, above all, the ornamentation, had a cheap, evening-party supper aspect. There was the plated *épergne* which showed so much copper that it seemed to be trying to out-brazen the battered Roman cup-shaped wine-coolers, in each of which stood icing a bottle of champagne, quite unknown to fame—a wine with which a respectable bottle of Burton ale would have considered it beneath its dignity to associate. There were flowers upon the table furnished by the pastry-cook ; and though a couple of shillings would have supplied a modest selection of the real, according to well-established custom these were artificial, many of them being fearfully and wonderfully made.

That artificiality pervaded the whole repast, which from beginning to end was suggestive of oil-made, puffed-up pastry, which would crush into nothing at a touch ; while soups, gravies, and the preparations of

animal flesh, purveyed and presented under names in John Bull French, with a good deal of *à la* in the composition, one and all tasted strongly of essence of beef, that delicious combination of tin-pot, solder, resin, and molten glue, which flavours so many of our cheaper feasts.

To give the whole a *distingué* air, the London pastrycook had sent down, beside his red-nosed *chef* and dubiously bright stewpans, those two well-known, ghastly-white temples, composed of sugar and chalk, which do duty at scores of wedding-breakfasts, and then stand in the pastrycook's window afterwards covered with glass shades, to keep them from the unholy touch of flies, and their sides from desecration by rubbing shoulders with the penny buns.

It was a mistake, too, to engage Mortimer, the gentleman who waited table for the gentry of Hampton Court, and invariably took the lead in single-handed places and played the part of butler. Mr. Mortimer had been in service—*the* service, he called it—saved money, applied to a rising brewer, and taken a public-house 'doing' a great number of barrels per week, so he was informed; but the

remarkable fact about that house was that as soon as Mr. Mortimer had paid over his hard-earned savings and taken his position as landlord, the whole district became wonderfully temperate, and, to use his own words, 'If I hadn't taken to paying for glasses of ale myself, and so kept the engine going, there would have been next to nothing to do.' The result was that in six months Mr. Mortimer had to leave the house, a poorer and a wiser man, picking up odd jobs in waiting afterwards in the Palace and neighbourhood, but retaining his habit of buying himself glasses of ale to a rather alarming extent.

This habit was manifest upon the entrance of the first course, and had greatly exercised Joseph in spirit lest it should be detected. In fact, it became so bad by the time that the remove in the second course was due, that the footman made a strategic movement, inveigling Mr. Mortimer into the big cupboard where knives and boots and shoes were cleaned, and then and there locking him up in company with a glass and jug.

Perhaps a viler dinner, worse managed, was never set before guests; but to Lord Henry Moorpark it

was a banquet in dreamland, to Mr. Elbraham it was a feast, for from the moment he took down Clotilde to that when the ladies rose to return to the drawing-room, he literally gloated over and devoured the Honourable Misses Dymcox's niece.

Good dinners, served in the most refined style, had lost their charm for the visitors, who seemed perfectly satisfied, Elbraham's face shining like a sun when he smiled blandly at his *vis-à-vis*, whose deeply-lined, aristocratic countenance wore an aspect of pleasant satisfaction as he gazed back at the millionaire.

'I say, Moorpark, they look well, don't they?' said Elbraham.

'They do, indeed,' assented Lord Henry, smiling.

'Make some of them stare on the happy day, I think.'

'They are certainly very, very beautiful women,' replied Lord Henry, smiling and thoughtful.

'Eh—what? Oh, ah—yes: coffee. Thanks; I'll take coffee.'

This to Joseph, who brought in a black mixture with some thin hot milk and brown sugar to match. Lord Henry also took a cup, but it was observable

that neither gentleman got much farther than a couple of spoonfuls.

‘Well,’ said Elbraham suddenly, stretching out his hairy paws, and examining their fronts and backs, ‘it’s of no use our sitting here drinking wine, is it?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Lord Henry, who had merely sipped the very thin champagne at dinner and taken nothing since.

So the gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room, where certain conversations took place before they left, the effect of which was to send Mr. Elbraham back to town highly elate, and Lord Henry to his old bachelor home a sadder, if not a wiser, man.

He had found his opportunity, or, rather, it had been made for him, and he had plainly asked Marie to be his wife.

‘I know I ask you to make a sacrifice,’ he said—‘you so youthful and beautiful, while I am old, and not possessed of the attraction a young man might have in your eyes; but if you will be my wife, nothing that wealth and position can give shall be wanting to make yours a happy home.’

He thought Marie had never looked so beautiful

before, as with flushed cheeks she essayed to speak, and, smiling as he took her soft, white hand in his, he asked her to be calm and patient with him.

‘I dread your refusal,’ he said; ‘and yet, old as I am, there is no selfishness in my love. I wish to see you happy, my child—I wish to make you happy.’

‘She has accepted him,’ thought Marie; and her heart began to beat with painful violence, for, Clotilde away, who could say that Marcus Glen would not come to her for sympathy, and at last ask her love. She felt that she could not accept Lord Henry’s proposal, and she turned her face towards him in an appealing way.

‘You look troubled, my child,’ he said tenderly. ‘I want you to turn to me as you would to one who has your happiness thoroughly at heart. I want to win your love.’

‘My—my aunts know that you ask me this, Lord Henry?’ she faltered.

‘Yes, they know it; and they wish it, for we have quietly discussed the matter, and,’ he added, with a sad smile, ‘I have not omitted to point out to them

how unsuited to you I am as a match. I throw myself then upon your mercy, Marie, but you must not let fear influence you ; I must have your heart, my child, given over to my safe-keeping.'

She looked at him wildly.

'Is this hand to be mine?' he whispered. 'Will you make the rest of my days blessed with your young love? Tell me, is it to be?'

'Oh, no, no, no, Lord Henry,' she said, in a low, excited tone; 'I could not, I dare not say yes. Pray, pray do not ask me.'

'Shall I give you time?' he whispered; 'shall I wait a week—a month, for your answer, and then come again and plead?'

'Oh, no, no, no,' she said; 'I could—I never could say yes. I like you, Lord Henry, I respect and esteem you—indeed, indeed I do; but I could not become your wife.'

'You could not become my wife,' he said softly. 'No, no, I suppose not. It was another foolish dream, and I should have been wiser. But you will not ridicule me when I am gone? I ask you to try and think of the old man's love with respect, even if

it is mingled with pity, for, believe me, my child, it is very true and honest.'

'Ridicule ! oh, no, no,' cried Marie eagerly, 'I could not do that. You ask me to be your wife, Lord Henry : I cannot, but I have always felt that I loved you as—like——'

'You might say a father or some dear old friend ?' said Lord Henry sadly.

'Yes, indeed yes !' she cried.

'Be it so, then,' he said, holding her hand in his in a sad, resigned way. 'You are right ; it is impossible. Your young verdant spring and my frosted winter would be ill matched. But let me go on loving you—if not as one who would be your husband, as a very faithful friend.'

'Yes, yes, please, Lord Henry,' she said ; 'I have so few friends.'

'Then you shall not lose me for one,' he continued sadly. 'There, there, the little dream is over, and I am awake again. See here, Marie,' he said, drawing a diamond and sapphire ring from his pocket, 'this was to be your engaged ring : I am going to place it on your finger now as a present from the dear old friend.'

She shrank from him, but he retained her hand gently, and she felt the ring glide over her finger, a quick glance showing her that her aunts were seeing everything from behind the books they were reading, becoming deeply immersed, though, as they saw how far matters seemed to have progressed.

Mr. Elbraham's wooing was moulded far differently to Lord Henry's.

It was an understood thing that he was to propose that evening, the dinner being given for the purpose.

'There's no confounded tom-fool nonsense about me;' and each time Mr. Elbraham said this he took out of the morocco white satin-lined case a brilliant half-hoop ring, set with magnificent stones, breathed on it, held it to the light, moistened it between his lips, held it up again, finished by rubbing it upon his sleeve, and returning it to the case.

'That'll fetch her,' he said. 'My! what you can do with a woman if you bring out a few diamonds. I shan't shilly-shally: I shall come out with it plump;' but all the same, when by proper manœuvring the Honourable Misses Dymcox had arranged them-

selves behind books and left the two couples at opposite ends of the room, while they themselves occupied *dos-à-dos* the ottoman in the centre, Mr. Elbraham did not 'out with it plump.'

He seated himself as close as decency would permit to Clotilde, and stared at her, and breathed hard, while she returned his look with one that was half mocking, half defiant.

'Been to many parties lately?' he said at last, nothing else occurring to his mind except sentences that he would have addressed to ballet-girls upon their good looks, their agility, and the like.

No ; Clotilde had not been to many parties.

'But you like 'em ; I'll bet a wager you like 'em ?' said Elbraham with a hoarse laugh.

Oh yes, Clotilde dearly liked parties when they were nice.

There was another interval of hard breathing, during which Mr. Elbraham took out and consulted his watch.

The act of replacing that made him remember the ring in the morocco case, and he thrust his finger and thumb in his vest pocket, but it was not there, and he

remembered that he had placed it in his trousers pocket.

This was awkward, for Mr. Elbraham was stout and his garments tight. Still, he would want it directly, and he made a struggle and dragged it out, growing rather red in the face with the effort.

This gave him something else to talk about.

‘Ha! it’s nice to be you,’ he said, dropping the case in his vest.

‘Why?’ said Clotilde, looking amused.

‘Because you gal—ladies dress so well; not like us, always in black. That’s a pretty dress.’

‘Think so?’ said Clotilde carelessly.

‘Very pretty. I like it ever so, but it isn’t half good enough for you.—That’s getting on at last,’ he muttered to himself.

‘Oh yes, but it is. Aunt Philippa said it was a very expensive dress.’

‘Tchh, my dear, rubbish! Why, I would not see anyone I cared for in such a dress as that. I like things rich and good, and the best money can buy.’

‘Do you?’ said Clotilde innocently; but her cheeks began to burn.

‘Do I? Yes; I should just think I do. Look here! What do you think of that?’

He took out and opened the little case, breathed on the diamonds, and then held them in a good light.

‘Oh, how lovely!’ said Clotilde softly.

‘Ain’t they?’ said Elbraham. ‘They’re the best they’d got at Hancock’s, in Bond Street. Pretty stiff figure, too, I can tell you.’

‘Are you fond of diamonds, Mr. Elbraham?’ she said, with a peculiar look at him from beneath her darkly fringed lids—a strange look for one so innocent and young.

‘Yes, on some people,’ he said. ‘Are you?’

‘Oh yes; I love them,’ she said eagerly.

‘All right, then. Look here, Clotilde; say the word, and you can have diamonds till you are sick of them, and everything else. I—hang it all! I’m not used to this sort of thing,’ he said, dabbing his moist face with his handkerchief; ‘but I said to myself, when I came to-night, “I won’t shilly-shally, but ask her out plain.” So look here, my dear, may I put this diamond ring on the finger of the lady that’s to be Mrs. Elbraham as soon as she likes?’

Clotilde darted one luminous look at him which took in his squat, vulgar figure and red face, and then her eyes half closed, and she saw tall, manly, handsome Marcus Glen look appealingly in her eyes, and telling her he loved her with all his heart.

She loved him — she told herself she loved him very dearly ; but he was poor, and on the one side was life in lodgings in provincial towns wherever the regiment was stationed ; on the other side, horses and carriages and servants, a splendid town mansion, diamonds, dresses, the opera, every luxury and gaiety that money could command.

‘Poor Marcus!’ she sighed to herself. ‘He’s very nice!’

‘Come,’ said Mr. Elbraham ; ‘I don’t suppose you want me to go down on my knees and propose, do you ? I want to do the thing right, but I’m a business man, you know ; and, I say, Clotilde, you’re the most beautiful gal I ever saw in my life.’

She slowly raised her eyes to his, and there was a wicked, mocking laugh in her look as she said in a low tone :

‘Am I?’

‘Yes, that you are,’ he whispered in a low, passionate tone.

‘You are laughing at me,’ she said softly.

‘Pon my soul I’m not,’ he whispered again; ‘I swear I’m not; and I love you—there, I can’t tell you how much. I say, don’t play with me. I’ll do anything you like—give you anything you like. I’ll make the princesses bite their lips with jealousy to see your jewels. I will, honour! May I? Yes? Slip it on? I say, my beautiful darling, when may I put on the plain gold one?’

‘Oh, hush!’ she whispered softly, as she surrendered her hand, and fixed her eyes in what he told himself was a loving, rapturous gaze upon his; ‘be content now.’

‘But no games,’ he whispered; ‘you’ll be my wife?’

‘Yes,’ she said in the same low tone, and he raised the beringed hand to his lips, while the Honourable Isabella uttered a little faint sigh, and her book trembled visibly in her attenuated hands.

‘Hah!’ ejaculated Mr. Elbraham; and then to himself: ‘What things diamonds are!’

Perhaps he would have felt less satisfied if he had known that, when Clotilde fixed her eyes upon his, she was looking down a long vista of pleasure stretched out in the future.

At the same moment the face of Marcus Glen seemed to rise up before her, but she put it aside as she lifted the hand that Elbraham had just kissed.

‘He could not have brought me such a ring as that,’ she said to herself; and then, ‘Heigho! poor fellow; but it isn’t my fault. I must tell him I am only doing what my dear aunts wish.’

She placed the ring against her deep-red lips and kissed it very softly, her beautiful eyes with their long fringed lids looking dark and dewy, and full of a delicious languor that made Mr. Elbraham sit with his arms resting upon his knees, and gaze at her with half-open mouth, while he felt a strange feeling of triumph at his power as a man of the world, and thought of how he would show off his young wife to all he knew, and gloat over their envy.

Then a sense of satisfaction and love of self came over him, and he indulged in a little glorification of Mr. Elbraham.

‘Litton’s a humbug,’ he said to himself; ‘I can get on better without his advice than with it. Women like a fellow to be downright with them, and say what he means.’

CHAPTER X.

GLEN DECLARES WAR.

DICK MILLET placed a note in his friend's hand one day during parade, and Glen thrust it out of sight on the instant, glancing sidewise to see if Major Malpas had noticed the act, and then biting his lip with vexation at Dick being so foolish.

A good deal of the foolishness was on his own side, for had he taken the letter in a matter-of-fact manner, no one would have paid the slightest heed, or fancied that it came from a lady in a clandestine way.

But, as is generally the case in such matters, the person most anxious to keep his correspondence a secret is one of the first to betray himself, and, feeling this, Glen was in no very good humour.

The secret correspondence he had been carrying on

with Clotilde was very sweet ; but it annoyed him sadly, for his was not a nature to like the constant subterfuge. By nature frank and open, there was to him something exceedingly degrading in the fact that servants were bribed and the aunts deceived ; and with a stern determination to put an end to it all, and frankly speak to the Honourable Misses Dymcox concerning his attachment to Clotilde, he went on with his duties till the men were dismissed.

‘ How could you be so stupid, Dick !’ he exclaimed, as soon as they were clinking back, sabre and spur, to their quarters.

‘ Foolish !’ said the little fellow, with a melodramatic laugh ; ‘ I thought you would like to get your letter. I don’t care about keeping all the fun to myself.’

‘ What’s the matter ?’ said Glen, smiling. ‘ Has the fair Marie been snubbing you ?’

‘ No. Look at your letter,’ said the little fellow tragically.

Glen placed his hand in his breast, but, altering his mind, he walked on to his room before taking out the letter and glancing at it ; then leaping up, he

strode out into the passage and across to Dick's quarters, to find that gentleman looking the very image of despair.

'Here, what does this mean?' exclaimed Glen.
'Why did you not send my note with yours?'

'Did!'

'Then how is it you have brought it back?'

'That scoundrel Joseph!' exclaimed Dick. 'I won't believe but that it's some trick on his part, for I don't trust a word he says.'

'What does he say, then?'

'That they returned the notes unopened, and that—can you bear it?'

'Bear it! Bear what? Of course—yes; go on.'

'I've heard that Clotilde has accepted Mr. Elbraham, and they are going to be married directly.'

Glen stood and glared at him for a moment, and then burst into a hearty laugh.

'Absurd! nonsense! Why, who told you this?'

'Joseph.'

'Rubbish! Joseph is an ass. The fellow forgot to deliver the letters.'

Dick spoke to him again, but Glen did not hear his

words in the anger that had taken possession of him. He had, against his will, allowed himself to be swayed by Clotilde, and carried on the clandestine correspondence that was repugnant to his frank nature; and now he blamed himself for his conduct.

‘Look here, Dick,’ he cried at last, ‘we have been behaving like a couple of foolish boys ashamed of their feelings, and the consequence is we have been unable to take the part of those two when they have been urged to accept proposals by their aunts.’

‘Don’t say *they*; it is only Clotilde.’

‘I’ll wager it is Marie as well, my boy; else why did you get your note back?’

Dick looked staggered, and gazed in his friend’s face.

‘I say, you know, what are you going to do?’ he said it last.

‘Going straight to the private apartments to see the aunts. Come with me?’

‘What, to meet the old dragons, and talk about it?’

‘Yes, of course. It is cowardly to hold back.’

‘That’s—er—a matter of opinion,’ said Dick, who looked uneasy. ‘I—er—don’t think it would be quite wise to go.’

‘As you like!’ said Glen shortly; and before the boy could quite realize the position the door swung back heavily and his visitor was gone.

‘Well,’ said Dick thoughtfully, ‘I could go through a good deal for Marie’s sake, and would give a good deal to see her now, but face those two old Gorgons? No, not this time; I’d rather take a header into the Thames any day, and I don’t believe Glen has gone, after all.’

But he had gone straight to the private apartments, rung, and sent in his card to where the Honourable Misses Dymcox were discussing preparations for the marriage, with their nieces in the room.

‘Captain Glen!’ exclaimed the Honourable Philippa, starting as she read the card; ‘so early! What can he want?’

Marie glanced at her sister, and saw that she looked flushed and excited; but as soon as Clotilde found that she was observed, she returned a fierce, defiant glance at Marie’s inquisitive eyes.

‘Had — hadn’t we better say “Not at home”?’ whispered the Honourable Isabella.

‘No: it would be cowardly,’ replied her sister. ‘Joseph, you can show up Captain Glen.’

Clotilde rose and left the room, and Marie was following, but her aunt arrested her.

‘No, my dear, I would rather you would stay,’ she exclaimed; and full of sympathy, but at the same time unable to control a sense of gladness at her heart, Marie resumed her seat just as Ruth entered the room.

The next moment Glen was shown in, and after the customary salutations and commonplace remarks asked for a few minutes’ conversation with the ladies alone.

The Honourable Philippa was a good deal fluttered, but she preserved her dignity, and signed to Marie and Ruth to withdraw, the former darting a look full of meaning as she passed Marcus, who hastened to open the door, the latter glancing up at him for a moment, and he smiled back in her face, which was full of sympathy for him in his pain.

Glen closed the door in the midst of a chilling silence, and returned to his seat facing the thin sisters,

feeling that the task he had undertaken was anything but the most pleasant under the sun.

He was, however, too much stirred to hesitate, and he began in so downright a manner that he completely upset the balance—already tottering—of the Honourable Isabella, who felt so sympathetic that she was affected to tears.

‘I wished to have a few minutes’ conversation, ladies,’ he said, in rather a quick, peremptory tone, ‘respecting a question very near to my heart, and concerning my future happiness. Let me say, then, plainly, in what is meant to be a manly, straightforward fashion, that I love your niece Clotilde, and I have come to ask your consent to my being a constant visitor here.’

The Honourable Isabella could not suppress it: a faint sigh struggled to her lips, and floated away upon the chilly air of that dismal room, like the precursor of the shower that trembled upon the lashes of her eyes.

‘Captain Glen!’ cried the Honourable Philippa, making an effort to overcome her own nervousness, and dreading a scene on the part of this downright young man, ‘you astound me!’

‘I am very sorry I should take you so by surprise,’ he said quietly. ‘I hoped that you would have seen what my feelings were.’

‘Oh, indeed no!’ cried the Honourable Philippa mendaciously, ‘nothing of the kind—did we, sister?’

The Honourable Isabella’s hands shook a great deal, but she did not speak—only looked piteously at their visitor.

‘Perhaps I ought to have made my feelings known sooner,’ said Glen. ‘However, I have spoken now, Miss Dymcox, and——’

‘But, Captain Glen, pray spare us, and spare yourself what must be a very painful declaration, when I tell you that our niece is engaged to be married to Mr. Elbraham.’

‘Then it is true?’

‘Oh yes, perfectly true,’ said the Honourable Philippa.

Glen drew a long breath, and sat for some moments silently gazing down at the carpet as if he could not trust himself to speak. When he opened his lips again his voice was changed.

‘Am I to understand, madam, that Miss Clotilde

Dymcox accepts this Mr.—Mr. Elbraham of her own free choice and will ?’

It required a tremendous effort to get out that name ‘Elbraham,’ but he forced it from his lips at last.

‘Captain Glen,’ said the Honourable Philippa, rising and darting a very severe glance at her sister because she did not rise as well, ‘this is presuming upon your position here as an acquaintance—a very casual acquaintance. I cannot discuss this matter with you.’

‘As you will, madam,’ replied Glen, who felt hot with indignant rage. ‘May I ask your permission to see Clotilde ?’

‘To see Miss Clotilde Dymcox ?’ said the Honourable Philippa, with dignity. ‘Under the circumstances, I think, sister, certainly not.’

She darted another fierce look at the Honourable Isabella, who was growing weaker and more agitated moment by moment, as she asked herself whether it was possible that, in spite of the disparity of their ages, she might yet try to soothe Marcus Glen’s wounded spirit, and offer him the sympathy of her virgin heart.

‘I ask it in justice to myself, madam,’ cried Glen, ‘for your niece——’

He was going to say more, but he checked himself, and bit his lips. ‘Of course, ladies, you would be present.’

‘Impossible!’ said the Honourable Philippa grimly.

‘Don’t — don’t you think, sister,’ faltered the Honourable Isabella, ‘that — that — Captain Glen might—might just see—just see Clotilde—for a few moments?’

‘No!’ said the Honourable Philippa, with quite a snap of her artificial teeth, and the Honourable Isabella seemed to shrink back into herself, quite dismayed by her sister’s almost ferocious way.

‘I thank you, Miss Isabella,’ said Glen, so warmly that the poor old lady’s heart began to palpitate at an unwonted rate, and she trembled and her hands were agitated, as if she would gladly have laid them in their visitor’s broad palms.—‘You decline, then, to allow me to see Miss Clotilde?’

The Honourable Philippa bowed, and turned to her sister to see if she made as dignified a response to his appeal; but to her horror she saw her sister shaking

her head violently as Glen now appealed to her in turn.

‘Then, madam,’ cried Glen angrily, ‘I give you fair warning that I shall spare no pains to gain an interview with your niece, for I do not, I will not believe that this is honest. It cannot be, and I am certain that the poor girl has been forced into this engagement. Ladies, I will say no more, for I fear that if I do I shall lose my temper. Miss Dymcox, good-morning. Miss Isabella, I thank you for your show of sympathy ; good-bye.’

He felt that there could be no excuse for a longer stay, and strode angrily from the room ; but he had hardly reached the foot of the stairs before he became aware of the fact that Marie was coming out of the schoolroom, where Ruth was now alone and a witness of what passed.

‘Thank goodness!’ exclaimed Glen joyously, as he sprang forward and caught both Marie’s hands in his, making her flush and tremble with the warmth of his greeting. ‘Tell me, dear Marie, the meaning of all this dreadful news.’

She did not speak, but, giving herself up to

the joy of the situation, she let her hands rest in his and gazed wistfully in his face, while Ruth sat in her place in the schoolroom and trembled, she knew not why.

‘You do not speak,’ said Glen. ‘Tell me, for heaven’s sake tell me, that this is all in opposition to your sister’s wishes.’

Marie still gazed wistfully in his face, and her hands, in spite of herself, returned the warm pressure of his.

‘Surely—oh no ; I will not believe it!’ cried Glen. ‘It cannot be so. Marie, dear Marie, pray have compassion on me and tell me the truth.’

‘Do—you wish me to tell you?’ she said in a low voice that trembled with suppressed emotion.

‘Yes, everything. If you have any feeling for me, tell me honestly all.’

Marie’s hands trembled more and more, and her colour went and came as she spoke.

‘I will tell you what you wish, Captain Glen,’ she said, in her low rich tones; ‘but do not blame me if it gives you pain.’

‘I will not ; only pray put an end to this terrible anxiety.’

There was a few moments' silence, and then Glen said huskily :

‘ You know how Clotilde loved me, Marie ?’

Marie's dark eyes gazed fully, pityingly into his, but there was a slight curl of scorn upon her upper lip as she remained silent.

‘ No,’ she said slowly, as she shook her head ; ‘ no, I do not.’

‘ You—do not !’

Marie hesitated to plant so sharp a sting in his heart, but, still, she panted to speak—to tell him that he had wasted his honest love upon one who did not value it, in the hope that he might turn to her ; but at the same time she feared to overstep the mark, and her compunction to hurt the man she loved came and went.

‘ Why do you not tell me what you mean ?’ he said, pressing one of her hands so that he caused her intense pain.

‘ Because I shrink from telling you that Clotilde never cared for you in the least,’ she said bitterly.

‘ How dare you say that ?’ he cried.

‘ If she had loved you, Captain Glen, would she

have accepted Mr. Elbraham for the sake of his wealth ?’

He would have dropped her hand, but she held fast, full of passionate grief for him as she saw how deadly pale he had turned, and had they been in a less public place she would have clung to him, and told him how her heart bled for his pain.

‘You are her sister, and could not say that which was false,’ he said simply. ‘Tell me, then, is this all true ?’

‘Do you doubt me ?’ she asked, looking full in his eyes.

He held her hands, and looked down in the dark, handsome face that gazed so unflinchingly in his.

‘No,’ he said softly, ‘no ;’ and raising one of her hands to his lips, he kissed it, and then turned and left the place.

Marie’s reverie, as she stood there holding one soft hand pressed over the back of the other, where Marcus Glen’s lips had been, was interrupted by the voice of Clotilde.

‘Rie : has he gone ?’

‘Yes,’ said her sister, with a look of disgust, almost loathing, in her face.

‘Poor boy! I hope he won’t mind much. I say, Rie, you can have him now. I’ll make you a present of his love. No, I won’t,’ she said, flashing into life. ‘You shan’t look at him. If you do, I’ll tell him such things about you as shall drive him away.’

The sisters stood there upon the stairs gazing angrily one at the other, and Ruth, whose heart felt very sore, watched them in turn, and thought how hard all this was for Captain Glen, and also, with a sigh, how weak he must be.

‘But they are both so handsome,’ she said to herself half aloud; and then, with a kind of shiver, she began to think about Mr. Montaigne.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY LITTLETOWN'S DIPLOMACY.

MR. ELBRAHAM had not been long making up his mind to eschew shilly-shallying, and to propose at once. He was a clever man of business, and no one knew better than he how to work a few shares upon the Stock Exchange, and float a company so as to pour thousands into the laps of its promoters; but he had a weak side, and his late action was taken a good deal on account of the opposition he met with from his private secretary.

‘Going to dine with “the maids of honour” at Hampton Court!’ said this latter gentleman, looking up in astonishment as his principal announced his intention; ‘why, you grumbled at having to go to Lady Littletown’s the other day, and she does give good dinners.’

‘Capital,’ said the financier, smacking his lips.

‘But you won’t get anything fit to eat at the Palace.’

‘My object is to get into better society,’ said the financier promptly; ‘and the Dymcoxes are people of position. Of course, you know I met them there.’

‘Ah, to be sure; so you did. Well, they certainly belong to a good family.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Elbraham, strutting pompously up and down the room. ‘Lovely girl that Miss Clotilde!’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Arthur Litton; ‘she is handsome, certainly.’

‘Humph! I should think she is, sir.’

‘But I’ve seen many finer women,’ continued Litton. ‘Not my style of girl at all.’

‘Should think not, indeed,’ said Elbraham hotly. ‘Bah, sir! stuff, sir! rubbish, sir! What do you know about handsome women?’

‘Well, certainly,’ said Litton humbly, and with a smile, as the financier walked away from him down the room—a smile which was replaced by a look as

serious as that of the proverbial judge, when the great man turned ; ‘ I suppose my opinion is not worth much.’

‘ I should think not, indeed. I tell you she is magnificent.’

‘ Oh, nonsense, my dear sir,’ said Litton warmly ; ‘ handsome if you like, but magnificent—no ! You know dozens of finer women.’

‘ Maybe, maybe,’ said the financier.

Litton paused for a few moments, tapping his teeth as if undecided, till his chief paused and looked at him curiously.

‘ Well, what is it ?’ he said.

‘ Look here, Mr. Elbraham,’ said Litton, ‘ I suppose we are not very good friends ?’

‘ H’m, I don’t know. You are in my pay,’ said the financier coarsely, ‘ so you ought to be one of my best friends.’

‘ You’ve said too many sharp things to me, Mr. Elbraham, to make me feel warmly towards you ; but, all the same, I confess that you have done me some very good turns in money matters ; and I hope, though I take your pay, that I am too much of a

gentleman to stand by and see anyone take a mean advantage of a weakness on your part.'

'Weakness? My part!' said the financier fiercely, as if the very idea of his being weak was absurd.

'Yes, sir, weakness. Look here, Mr. Elbraham, I should not like to see you taken in.'

'What do you mean, sir?'

'Mean?' said Litton. 'Well, Mr. Elbraham, I'm not afraid of you; so whether you are offended or not, I shall speak out.'

'Then speak out, sir, and don't shilly-shally.'

'Well, sir, it seems to me that there's a good deal of fortune-hunting about. Those Dymcox people have good blood, certainly; but they're as poor as rats, and I'll be bound to say nothing would please the old aunts better than hooking you, with one of those girls for a bait.'

'Will you have the goodness to reply to that batch of letters, Mr. Litton?' said Elbraham haughtily. 'I asked your opinion—or, rather, gave you my opinion—of Miss Clotilde Dymcox, and you favour me with a pack of impertinent insinuations regarding the family at Hampton Court.' Mr. Elbraham went

angrily out into the hall to don his light and tight overcoat and gray hat, and walk down to the station.

As Litton heard the door close he sank back in his chair at the writing-table, and laughed silently and heartily.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ he ejaculated; ‘and this is your clever financier—this is your man far above the ordinary race in shrewdness! Why am I not wealthy, too, when I can turn the scoundrel round my finger, clever as he believes he is? Clever, talented, great! Why, if I metaphorically pull his tail like one would that of a pig, saying, “You shan’t go that way!” he grunts savagely, and makes straight for the hole.’

Arthur Litton took one of Mr. Elbraham’s choice cigars from his case, deliberately pitched aside the letters he had to answer, struck a light, placed his heels upon the table, and, balancing his chair upon two legs, began to smoke.

‘Well, so far so good,’ he said at last, as he watched the aromatic rings of smoke ascend towards the ceiling. ‘I suppose it is so. Mr. Elbraham is one of the cleverest men on ’Change, and he manages the money-making world. I can manage Mr. Elbraham.

Ergo, I am a cleverer man than the great financier; but he makes his thousands where I make shillings and pence. Why is this?’

The answer was all smoke; and satisfactory as that aromatic, sedative vapour was in the mouth, it was lighter than the air upon which it rose, and Arthur Litton continued his soliloquizing.

‘I’m afraid that I shall never make any money upon ’Change, or by bolstering up bad companies, and robbing the widow, the orphan, the retired officer, and the poor parson of their savings. It is not my way. I should have no compunction if they were fools enough to throw me their money. I should take it and spend it, as Elbraham and a score more such scoundrels spend theirs. What does it matter? What is the difference to him between having a few hundred pounds more or less in this world? They talk about starvation when their incomes are more than mine. They say they are beggared when they have hundreds left. Genteel poverty is one of the greatest shams under the sun.

‘Not a bad cigar,’ he said, after a fresh pause. ‘He has that virtue in him, certainly, he does get

good cigars ; and money ! money ! money ! how he does get money—a scoundrel !—while I get none, or next to none. Well, well, I think I am pulling the strings in a way that should satisfy the most exacting of Lady Littletowns, and it is ridiculous how the scoundrel of a puppet dances to the tune I play.’

He laughed in a way that would have made his fortune had he played Mephistopheles upon the stage. Then, carefully removing a good inch and a half of ash :

‘And now, my sweet old match-maker,’ he continued, ‘will you keep your promise ? I am a poor unlucky devil, and the only way to save me is by settling me with a rich wife such as she promises.

‘Hum, yes !’ he said softly, ‘a wife with a good fortune. Elbraham takes one without a penny, for the sake of her looks ; the aunts sell the girl for the sake of his money. A cheerful marriage, and,’ he added cynically, ‘as the French say, *après ?*

‘Take my case, as I am in a humour for philosophizing. I am to be introduced to a rich lady, and shall marry her for the sake of the fortune. She will marry me for my youth, I suppose, and good looks—I

suppose I may say good looks,' he continued, rising, crossing the room, and gazing in the glass. 'Yes, Arthur, you may add good looks, for you are a gentlemanly fellow, and just of an age to attract a woman who is decidedly off colour.'

He paused, rested his elbows upon the chimney-piece, and kept on puffing little clouds of smoke against the mirror, watching them curiously as they obliterated his reflection for the moment, and then rolled slowly up, singularly close to the glass.

He did this again and again, watching his dimly-seen reflection till it had grown plain, and then he laughed as if amused.

'Yes, I am decidedly good-looking, and I say it without vanity,' he continued, 'for I am looking at myself from a marketable point of view. And the lady? Suppose I always look at her through the clouds, for she will be elderly and plain—of that I may rest assured; but I can gild her; she will be gilded for me, and as the Scots say, "a' cats are gray i' the dark," so why should I mind? If I wed the fairest woman under the sun I should forget her looks in a week, while other men worried me by their

admiration. So there it is, ladies and gentlemen ; the fair Clotilde and the manly Arthur Litton about to be sold by Society's prize-auction to the highest bidders, and this is the land where slavery is unknown—the land of the free ! This, ladies and gentlemen, is Christian England !

He seemed to be highly amused at this idea, and laughed and gazed at himself in the glass as if perfectly satisfied that his face would make a change in his lot, after which he threw away the remains of the cigar he was smoking, and taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he walked across to Elbraham's cabinet, which he unlocked, and helped himself to a couple of the best Rothschilds, one of which he lit.

Arthur Litton was very thoughtful now, and it took some time to get to work ; but he finished the task entrusted to him, and then, after a little consideration, he rose to go, making his way to Lady Littletown's.

Her ladyship was at home, in the conservatory, the footman said ; and treating the visitor as an old friend, he opened the drawing-room door, and Litton walked in unannounced.

Her ladyship was busy, in a pair of white kid gloves,

snipping off faded leaves and flowers, and she left her occupation to greet her visitor.

‘Well, Arturo, no bad news, I hope?’

‘Only that the great Potiphar, the man of money, is completely hooked, and determined to embark upon the troubled sea of matrimony.’

‘Is that bad news?’ said her ladyship. ‘I call it a triumph of diplomacy, Arturo. Spoils from the enemy!’

‘Then you are satisfied?’

‘More than satisfied, my clever diplomat, and you shall have your reward.’

‘When?’

Lady Littletown snipped here and snipped there, treating some of her choicest flowers in a way that would have maddened her head gardener had he seen, for unfaded flowers dropped here and there beneath the stands in a way that showed her ladyship to be highly excited.

‘Now look here, Arturo,’ she exclaimed at last, as she turned upon him, and seemed to menace him with her sharp-pointed scissors, which poked and snipped at him till a bystander might have imagined that

Lady Littletown took him for a flower whose head gave her offence—‘Now look here, Arturo, do you want to make me angry?’

‘No: indeed no,’ he cried deprecatingly.

‘Then why do you ask me such a question as that?’

‘Well,’ he said, smiling, ‘is it not reasonable that I should feel impatient?’

‘Perhaps so. I’ll grant it; but, my good boy, you must be a man of the world; and now that we are upon that subject, let us understand one another.’

‘By all means,’ assented Litton eagerly.

‘First of all, though, I cannot worry myself with too much work at once. I have those two girls to marry, and I must get that out of hand before I undertake more.’

‘Exactly; and all is now in train.’

‘Many a slip, Arturo, ’twixt cup and lip; but we shall see—we shall see.’

Her ladyship went on snipping vigorously.

‘I want you to understand me. To speak plainly, Arturo, you are a gentleman of great polish.’

‘Thanks,’ he said, bowing.

‘And a good presence.’

He bowed again.

‘You are not quite handsome, but there is an aristocratic, well-bred look about you that would recommend you to any lady—and I mean you to marry a lady.’

‘Yes, by all means. Pray don’t find me a young person who might pass for a relative of the great Elbraham.’

‘My good boy, there is no such party in the field ; and if there were, I should not allow you to try and turn up that haughty aristocratic nose at her. A hundred thousand pounds, dear Arturo, would gild over a great many blemishes.’

‘True, O queen !’ he said, smiling.

‘As I said before, let us understand one another. You must not be too particular. Suppose the lady chances to be old ?’

Litton made a grimace.

‘And rich—very rich ?’

‘That would make amends,’ he said with a smile.

‘I could marry you myself, Arturo,’ she continued,

looking very much attenuated and hawk-like as she smiled at him in a laughing way.

‘Why not?’ he cried eagerly, as the richly-furnished home and income opened out to his mind ease and comfort for life.

‘Because I am too old,’ she said, smiling at the young man’s impetuosity.

‘Oh, no,’ he cried; ‘you would be priceless in my eyes.’

‘Hold your tongue, Arturo, and don’t be a baby,’ said her ladyship. ‘I tell you I am too old to be foolish enough to marry. There are plenty of older women who inveigh against matrimony, and profess to have grown too sensible and too wise to embark in it, who would give their ears to win a husband.’

‘Why should not Lady Littleton be placed in this list?’ said Litton meaningly.

‘Because I tell you she is too old in a worldly way. No, my dear boy, when an elderly woman marries, it is generally because she is infatuated with the idea of possessing a young husband. She thinks for the moment that he woos her for her worldly store; but she is so flattered by his attentions that these outweigh

all else, and she jumps at the opportunity of changing her state.'

'Again, then,' he whispered impressively, 'why should not this apply to Lady Littleton?'

'Silence, foolish boy!' she cried, menacing him again with the scissors, and holding up her flower-basket as if to catch the snipped-off head. 'I tell you I am too old in a worldly way. When a matter-of-fact woman reaches my years, and knows that she has gradually been lessening her capital in the bank of life, she tries to get as much as possible in the way of enjoyment out of what is left.'

'Exactly,' he cried eagerly.

'She takes matters coolly and weighs them fairly before her. "If," she says, "I take the contents of this scale I shall get so much pleasure. If I choose the contents of this other scale, I shall again obtain so much."'

'Well, what then?' said Litton, for her ladyship paused in the act of decapitating a magnificent Japan lily.

'What then? Foolish boy! Why, of course she chooses the scale that will give her most pleasure.'

‘ Naturally,’ he said.

‘ Then that is what I do.’

‘ But would not life with a man who would idolize you be far beyond any other worldly pleasure?’

‘ Yes,’ said her ladyship drily; ‘ but give me credit, *mio caro* Arturo, for not being such an old idiot as to believe that you would idolize me, as you call it.’

‘ Ah, you don’t know,’ he cried.

‘ What you would be guilty of to obtain a good settlement in life, my dear boy?’

‘ You insult me,’ he cried angrily.

‘ Oh no, my impetuous young friend; but really, Arturo, that was well done. Capital! It would be winning with some ladies. Rest assured that you shall have a rich wife. As for me, I have had you in the scale twice over. I did once think of marrying you.’

‘ You did?’ he cried with real surprise.

‘ To be sure I did,’ she said quietly. ‘ Why not? I said to myself, “I am careless of the opinion of the world, and shall do as I please;” and I pictured out my home with you, a *distingué* man, at the head.’

‘ You did?’ he said excitedly.

‘Of course I did. And then I pictured it as it is, with Lady Littletown, a power in her way, a well-known character in society, whose word has its influence, and one who can sway the destinies of many, in many ways, in the world.’

‘No; say in one,’ he exclaimed rather bitterly—‘in the matrimonial world.’

‘As you will, *cher* Arthur,’ replied her ladyship. ‘You see, I am frank with you. I weighed it all carefully, as I said, and weighed it once again, to be sure that I was making no mistake, and the result was dead against change.’

‘Highly complimentary to me!’

‘A very excellent thing for you, my dear boy; for you would have led a wretched life.’

‘Assuming that your ladyship’s charms had conquered my youthful, ardent heart?’ he said.

‘Silly boy! you are trying to be sarcastic,’ said Lady Littletown. ‘Pish! I am too thick-skinned to mind it in the least. Be reasonable and listen, dear brother-in-arms.’

‘Why not lover-in-arms?’ he cried quickly—‘in those arms.’

Lady Littletown placed her scissors in the hand that held the basket, raised her square gold eyeglass, and looked at her visitor.

‘Well done, Arturo! excellent, *mon général!* Why, you would carry the stoutest fort I set you to attack in a few days. I have not heard anything so clever as that apt remark of yours for months. Really,’ she continued, dropping the glass and resuming her scissors, ‘I am growing quite proud of you—I am indeed.’

‘And so you mock at me,’ he said angrily.

‘Not I, Arturo; you were only practising; and it was very smart. No, my dear, it would not do for you; and I tell you frankly, you have had a very narrow escape.’

‘Why?’ he said; and his eyes glanced round at the rich place with its many indications of wealth, and as he noted these there came to his memory his last unpaid bill.

‘Because I have a horrible temper, and I am a terrible tyrant. Of course you would have married me for my money and position.’

‘Don’t say that,’ cried Litton.

‘Don’t be a donkey, Arthur, *mon cher*,’ said the lady. ‘Well, to proceed: I should have married you because you were young and handsome.’

‘Your ladyship seemed to indicate just now that I was not handsome,’ said Litton.

‘Did I? Well, I retract. I do think you handsome, Arturo, and I should have been horribly jealous of you as soon as I found that you were paying your court elsewhere.’

‘Does your ladyship still imagine that I could be such a scoundrel?’ cried Litton, in indignant tones.

The square golden eyeglass went up again.

‘Excellent, Arturo, my dear boy! You would have made a fortune upon the stage in tragi-comedy. Nothing could have been finer than that declaration. Really, I am proud of you! But I should have led you a horrible life, and been ready to poison you if I found you out in deception.’

‘Lady Littletown, I hope I am a gentleman,’ said the visitor haughtily.

‘I hope you are, I’m sure, my dear boy,’ said her ladyship, smiling at him serenely. ‘But, as you see, I could not have put up with my money being lavished

upon others; and hence I thought it better to let someone else have you.'

'But, my dear Lady Littletown——'

'Ah, tut, tut, tut! no rhapsodies, please, my sweet ingenuous Lubin. I am no Phyllis now, believe me, and all this is waste of words. There, be patient, my dear boy, and you shall have a rich wife, and she shall be as young as I can manage; but, mind, I do not promise beauty. Do you hear? Are the raptures at an end?'

'Oh yes, if you like,' he said bitterly.

'I do like, my dear boy; so they are at an end. Really, Arturo, I feel quite motherly towards you. and, believe me, I shall not rest until I see you well mated.'

'Thanks, my dear Lady Littletown,' he said; 'and with that, I suppose, I am to be contented.'

'Yes, sir; and you ought to be very thankful, Do you hear?'

'Yes,' he replied, taking and kissing one of her ladyship's gardening gloves. 'And now I must be for saying *au revoir*.'

'*Au revoir, cher garçon*,' replied her ladyship; and

she followed her visitor out of the conservatory into the drawing-room, and rang the bell for the servant in attendance to show him out.

‘It wouldn’t have been a bad slice of luck to have married her and had this place. But, good heavens, what an old hag!’

‘I should have been an idiot to marry him,’ said her ladyship, as soon as she was alone. ‘He is very handsome and gentlemanly and nice; but he would have ruined me, I am sure of that. Ah well, the sooner I find him someone else with a good income the better. Let him squander that. Why——’

She stopped short.

‘How stupid of me! The very thing! Lady Anna Maria Morton has just come in for her brother’s estate.’

Lady Littletown stood thinking.

‘She is fifty if she is a day, perhaps fifty-five, and as tremulous as Isabella Dymcox. But what of that? Dear Anna Maria! I have not called upon her for a fortnight. How wrong! I shall be obliged to have a little *partie carrée* to dinner. Let me see—Lady Anna Maria, Arthur, myself, and—dear, dear—dear,

dear me ! Who shall I have that is not stupid enough to spoil sport ?'

She walked about in a fidgety manner, and then picked up her card-basket, raised the square gold eyeglass, and turned the cards over in an impatient manner.

'Not one—not one !' she cried reluctantly. 'Never mind ; she shall come to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and Arthur shall drop in by accident, and stop. Dear boy, how I do toil and slave on his behalf ! But stay,' she added, after a pause ; 'shall I wait and get the Dymcox business over first ? No ; what matters ? I am diplomat enough to carry on both at once ; and, by-the-bye, I must not let that little military boy slip through my fingers, for he really is a prize. Taken with Marie ; but that won't do,' she continued. 'Moorpark must have her, and I dare say somebody will turn up.'

She took her seat at the table then, and began to write a tiny note upon delicately-scented paper. The first words after the date were : 'My dearest Anna Maria,' and she ended with : 'Your very affectionate friend.'

CHAPTER XII.

A MATTER-OF-FACT MATCH.

DICK MILLET received a note in his uncle's crabbed hand one morning at Hampton Court, obtained leave, and hurried up to town, calling at Grosvenor Square to hear the last news about Gertrude, but finding none.

On arriving at Wimpole Street, Vidler opened the door to the visitor, and smiled as he did so in rather a peculiar way.

‘Can I speak to my uncle?’ said Dick importantly. And he was shown up into the drawing-room, which seemed more gloomy now, lit as it was by four wax-candles, which were lost, as it were, in a great mist of old-time air, that had been shut up in that room till it had grown into a faded and yellow atmosphere

carefully preserved from the bleaching properties of the sun.

The little opening was to his right, with the white hand visible on the ledge ; but Dick hardly saw it, for, as he entered, Gertrude ran to his arms, to fall sobbing on his neck, while John Huish came forward offering his hand.

‘Then it was you, John Huish, after all?’ Dick exclaimed angrily, as he placed his own hand behind his back.

‘Yes, it was I. What else could I do, forbidden as I was to come to the house? Come, my dear Dick, don’t be hard upon me now.’

‘But,’ exclaimed Dick in a puzzled way, ‘how was all this managed?’

‘Shall we let that rest?’ said Huish, smiling. ‘Neither Gertrude nor I are very proud of our subterfuges. But come, we are brothers now. We can count upon you, can we not, to make friends with her ladyship.’

‘I—don’t know,’ said Dick quietly, for his mind was busy with the thoughts of the awkward reports he had heard concerning Huish and his position at

various clubs, and he asked himself whether he should be the friend and advocate of a man who was declared to be little better than a blackleg.

‘Surely I can count upon you,’ said Huish, after a pause.

‘Suppose we step down into the dining-room,’ said Dick stiffly; but he gave his sister an encouraging smile as she caught his hand.

‘Dick,’ she whispered, ‘what does this mean?’

‘Only a little clearing up between John Huish and me, dear,’ he said. ‘After that, I dare say I shall be able to tell you I’m glad you’re his wife.’

Gertrude smiled, and Huish followed down to the dining-room, which, lit by one candle, looked like a vault. Arrived here, though, Dick turned sharply upon his brother-in-law.

‘Now, look here, John Huish,’ he said, ‘I won’t quarrel about the past and this clandestine match, for perhaps, if I had been situated as you were, I should have done the same; but there is something I want cleared up.’

‘Let us clear it up at once then,’ said Huish, smiling. ‘What is it?’

‘Well, there are some sinister reports about you—you see, I speak plainly.’

‘Yes, of course. Go on.’

‘Well, they say commonly that you have been playing out of the square at the clubs; that you’ve been expelled from two, and that your conduct has been little better than that of a blackleg. John Huish, as a gentleman and my brother-in-law, how much of this is true? Stop a moment,’ he added hastily. ‘I know, old man, what it is myself to be pinched for money, and how a fellow might be tempted to do anything shady to get some together to keep up appearances. If there has been anything queer it must be forgiven; but you must give me your word as a man that for the future all shall be right.’

‘My dear Dick,’ cried Huish, ‘I give you my word that all in the future shall be square, as you term it; and I tell you this, that if any man had spoken such falsehoods about my wife’s brother, I should have knocked him down. There isn’t a word of truth in these reports, though I must confess they have worried me a great deal. Now, will you shake hands?’

‘That I will,’ cried Dick eagerly; ‘and I tell you now that I am glad that you have thrown dust in our eyes as you have. I always liked you, Huish, and you were about the only man from whom I never liked to borrow money.’

‘Why?’ said Huish, smiling.

‘Because I was afraid of losing a friend. Come up now, for Gertrude will be in a fidget to know what we have been saying.—Gertrude, my dear,’ he said as they re-entered the drawing-room, ‘it’s all right.’

An hour later Dick parted from the young couple at the little house they had taken in Westbourne Road, and cabbed back, to send her ladyship into a fainting fit by the announcement that his sister and her husband had been at his uncle’s.

‘For,’ said Lady Millet, ‘I can never forgive Gertrude; and as to that dreadful man Huish, in marrying him she has disgraced herself beyond the power to redeem her lot. Ah me! and these are the children I have nurtured in my bosom.’

It was rather hard work for Dick Millet, with his own love affairs in a state of ‘check,’ with no proba-

bility of 'mate,' but he felt that he must act ; and in his newly assumed character of head of the family he determined to go and try to smooth matters over at Chesham Place, and took a hansom to see Frank Morrison, who was now back at his own house, but alone, and who surlily pointed to a chair as he sat back pale and nervous of aspect, wrapped in a dressing-gown.

'Look here, Frank,' said Dick, sitting down, and helping himself to a cigar, 'we're brothers-in-law, and I'm not going to quarrel. I've come for the other thing.'

'My cigars, seemingly,' said the other.

'Yes ; they're not bad. But look here, old fellow, light up ; I want to talk to you.'

'If you want to borrow twenty pounds, say so, and I'll draw you a cheque.'

'Hang your cheque ! I didn't come to borrow money. Light up.'

Morrison snatched up a cigar, bit off the end, and lit it, threw himself back in his chair, and began to smoke quickly.

'Go on,' he said. 'What is it ?'

‘Wait a minute or two,’ said Dick. ‘Smoke five minutes first.’

Morrison muttered something unpleasant, but went on smoking, and at last Dick, who was sitting with his little legs dangling over the side of the chair, began.

‘Fact is,’ he said, ‘I’m going to speak out. I shan’t quarrel, and I’m such a little chap that you can’t hit me.’

‘No; but I could throw you downstairs,’ said Morrison, who was half amused, half annoyed by his visitor’s coming, though in his heart of hearts he longed to hear news of Renée.

‘I saw my uncle yesterday.’

‘Indeed! Poor old lunatic! What had he got to say?’

‘Ah, there you are wrong!’ said Dick sharply. ‘He said something which you will own proved that he was no lunatic.’

‘What was it?’ said Morrison coldly.

‘That you were a confounded scoundrel.’

Frank Morrison jumped up in his chair, scowling angrily; but he threw himself back again with a contemptuous ‘Pish!’

‘Proves it, don’t it?’

‘Look here,’ cried Morrison angrily, ‘I’ve had about enough of your family, so please finish your cigar and go.’

‘Shan’t. There, it’s no use to twist about. I’ve come on purpose to sit upon you.’

‘Look here,’ cried Morrison sternly, ‘has your sister sent you?’

‘No. I’ve come of my own free will, as I tell you, to show you what a fool you are, and to try and bring you to your senses.’

‘You are very ready at calling people fools,’ said Morrison, biting his nails.

‘Well, don’t you deserve to be called one for acting as you have acted? What did you do? Went mad after a woman who didn’t care a *son* for you; neglected a dear, good girl who did care for you, and exposed her to the persecutions of a scoundrel who has no more principle than that.’

He snapped his fingers, and, instead of firing up with rage, Morrison turned his face away and smoked furiously.

‘Now, isn’t that all true, Frank? Here, give me a light.’

Morrison lit a spill, passed it to his brother-in-law, and sank back in his chair.

‘I say,’ continued Dick, as he lit his cigar again, ‘isn’t it (*puff*) quite (*puff*) true?’

‘I suppose so,’ said the other listlessly. ‘She never cared for me, though, Dick. That scoundrel and she were old flames.’

‘First, a lie ; second, true,’ said Dick quietly. ‘Renée is as good as gold ; and when she found she was to be your wife, she accepted the inevitable and tried to do her duty, poor girl ! She was already finding out what a bad one Malpas was.’

‘Curse him ! don’t mention his name here !’ cried Morrison savagely.

‘I say she was already finding out what a cursed scoundrel Malpas was when she married you.’

‘She encouraged his visits afterwards,’ cried Morrison fiercely. ‘The villain owned it to me.’

‘And you didn’t thrust your fist down his throat?’

Morrison got up and paced the room.

‘Look here, Frank, old fellow : you are begin-

ning to find out what a donkey you have been. You are easy-going, and it's no hard job to lead you away. Now tell me this: didn't Malpas introduce you to a certain lady?'

'Yes,' was the sulky reply.

'Of course,' said Dick. 'He takes you and moulds you like putty, introduces you to people so as to make your wife jealous, out of revenge for your supplanting him, and then tries to supplant you in turn.'

'Dick Millet,' cried Morrison, 'you mean well, but I can't bear this. Either be silent or go. If I think of the scene on that dreadful night when I was sent home by a note written by that scoundrel of a brother-in-law of yours——'

'Meaning yourself?' said Dick coolly.

'I mean that double-faced, double-lived, double-dyed traitor, John Huish.'

'What!'

'The man who has fleeced me more than Malpas—curse him!—ever did.'

'Gently! I won't sit and hear John Huish maligned like that.'

'Maligned!' cried Morrison, with a bitter laugh.

‘As if anyone could say anything bad enough of the scoundrel!’

‘Look here, Frank,’ said Dick rather warmly, ‘I came here to try and do you a good turn, not to hear John Huish backbitten. He’s a good, true-hearted fellow, who has been slandered up and down, and he don’t deserve it.’

Morrison sat up, stared at him in wonder, and then burst into a scornful laugh.

‘Dick Millet,’ he exclaimed, ‘you called me a fool a little while ago. I won’t call you so, only ask you whether you don’t think you are one.’

‘I dare say I am,’ said Dick sharply. ‘But look here, are you prepared to prove all this about John Huish?’

‘Every bit of it, and ten times as much,’ said Morrison. ‘Why, this scoundrel won or cheated me of the money that paid for his wedding trip. He was with me till the last instant. Yes, and, as well as I can recollect, after he had got your sister away.’

Dick’s cigar went out, and his forehead began to pucker up.

‘Look here,’ he said: ‘you told me that he sent

you the note that made you go home that night. Where were you ?

‘ At a supper with some actresses.’

‘ But John Huish was not there !’

‘ Not there. Why, he was present with the lady who was his companion up to the time that he honoured your sister with his name. I believe he visits her now.’

‘ I can’t stand this,’ cried Dick, throwing away his cigar. ‘ How a fellow who calls himself a man can play double in this way gets over me. Frank Morrison, if I did as much I should feel as if I had “ liar ” written on my face, ready for my wife to see. It’s too much to believe about John Huish. I can’t—I won’t have it. Why, it would break poor little Gerty’s heart.’

‘ Break her heart !’ said Morrison bitterly. ‘ Perhaps she would take a leaf out of her sister’s book.’

‘ Confound you, Frank Morrison !’ cried Dick, in a rage, as he jumped up and faced his brother-in-law. ‘ I won’t stand it. My two sisters are as pure as angels. Do you dare to tell me to my face that you believe Renée guilty ?’

There was a dead silence in the room, and at last Frank Morrison spoke.

‘Dick,’ he said, and his voice shook, ‘you are a good fellow. You are right : I am a fool and a scoundrel.’

‘Yes,’ cried Dick ; ‘but do you dare to tell me you believe that of Renée?’

‘I’d give half my life to know that she was innocent,’ groaned Morrison.

‘You are a fool, then,’ cried Dick, ‘or you’d know it. There, I didn’t come to quarrel, but to try and make you both happy ; and now matters are ten times worse. But I won’t believe this about John.’

‘It’s true enough,’ said Morrison sadly. ‘Poor little lass ! I liked Gertrude. You should not have let that scoundrel have her.’

‘We have a weakness for letting our family marry scoundrels.’

‘Yes,’ said Morrison, speaking without the slightest resentment ; ‘she had better have had poor Lord Henry Moorpark.’

‘Oh!’ said Dick. ‘There, I’m going. ’Day.’

He moved towards the door, but Morrison stopped him.

‘Dick,’ he said; ‘did Renée know you were coming?’

‘No,’ was the curt reply.

‘Is she—is she still at your uncle’s?’

‘Yes, nearly always.’

‘Is she—is she well?’

‘No. She is ill. Heartsick and broken; and if what you say is true, she will soon have poor Gerty to keep her company.’

Dick Millet hurried away from his brother-in-law’s house, pondering upon his own love matters, and telling himself that he had more to think of than he could bear.

In happy ignorance of her ladyship’s prostrate state, John Huish, soon after his brother-in-law’s departure, hurried off to pay a hasty visit to his club, where he asked to see the secretary, and was informed that that gentleman was out. He threw himself into a cab, looking rather white and set of countenance as he had himself driven to Finsbury Square, where Daniel looked at him curiously as he ushered him into the doctor’s room.

‘My dear, dear boy, I am glad!’ cried the doctor,

dashing down his glasses. 'You did the old lady, after all, and carried the little darling off. Bless her heart! Why, the gipsy! Oh, won't I talk to her about this. That's the best thing I've known for years. What does your father say?'

'He wrote me word that he was very glad, and said he should write to Gertrude's uncle.'

'Ah, yes. H'm!' said the doctor. 'Best thing, too. They were once very great friends, John.'

'Yes, I have heard so,' said Huish. 'I think Captain Millet loved my mother.'

'H'm, yes,' said the doctor, nodding. 'They quarrelled. Well, but this is a surprise! You dog, you! But the secrecy of the whole thing! How snug you kept it! But, I say, you ought to have written to us all.'

'Well, certainly, I might have written to you, doctor, but I confess I forgot.'

'I say, though, you should have written to the old man.'

'We did, letter after letter.'

'Then that old—there, I won't say what, must have suppressed them. She was mad because her favourite

lost. It would have been murder to have tied her up to that wreck. I say, though, my boy,' continued the doctor seriously, 'I don't think you ought to have carried on so with Frank Morrison. He has had D. T. terribly.'

'What had that to do with me?' said Huish. 'If a man will drink, he must take the consequences.'

'Exactly,' said the doctor coldly; 'but his friends need not egg him on so as to win his money.'

'He should not choose scoundrels for his companions,' said Huish coldly.

'H'm, no, of course not,' said the doctor, coughing, and hurrying to change the conversation. 'By the way, why didn't you tell me all this when you came last?'

'How could I?' said Huish, smiling. 'I was not a prophet.'

'Prophet, no! but why keep it secret then?'

'Secret? Well,' said Huish; 'but really—I was not justified in telling it then.'

'What! not when you had been married?'

'I don't understand you,' said Huish, with his countenance changing.

‘I mean,’ said the doctor, ‘why didn’t you tell me when you were here a fortnight ago ; and—let me see,’ he continued, referring to his note-book, ‘you were due here last Wednesday, and again yesterday.’

John Huish drew a long breath, and the pupils of his eyes contracted as he said quietly :

‘Why, doctor, I told you that I had been on the Continent, and only returned two days ago.’

‘Yes ; of course. We know — fashionable fibs : Out of town ; not at home, etcetera, etcetera.’

‘My dear doctor,’ said Huish, fidgeting slightly in his seat, ‘I have always made it a practice to try and be honest in my statements. I tell you I only came back two days ago.’

‘That be hanged, John Huish!’ cried the doctor. ‘Why, you were here a fortnight ago yesterday.’

‘Nonsense,’ cried Huish excitedly. ‘How absurd!’

‘Absurd? Hang it, boy! do you think I’m mad? Here is the entry,’ he continued, reading. ‘Seventh, John Huish, Nervous fit—over-excitement—old bite of dog—bad dreams—dread of hydrophobia. Pre-

scribed, um—um—um—etcetera, etcetera. Now then, what do you say to that ?

‘ You were dreaming,’ said Huish.

‘ Dreaming ?’ said the doctor, laughing. ‘ What ! that you—here, stop a moment.’ He rang the bell. ‘ Ask Daniel yourself when you were here last.’

‘ What nonsense !’ said Huish, growing agitated. Then as the door opened, ‘ Daniel,’ he said quietly, ‘ when was I here last ?’

‘ Yesterday fortnight, sir,’ said the man promptly.

‘ That will do, Daniel !’ and the attendant retired as Huish sank back in his chair, gazing straight before him in a strange, vacant manner. ‘ What a fool I am !’ muttered the doctor. ‘ I’ve led him on to it again. Hang it ! shall I never understand my profession ?’

‘ I’ll go now,’ said Huish drearily, as he rose ; but Dr. Stonor pressed him back in his seat.

‘ No, no ; sit still a few minutes,’ he said quietly.

‘ I—I thought it was gone,’ said Huish ; ‘ and life seemed so bright and happy on ahead. Doctor, I’ve never confessed, even to you, what I have suffered from all this. I have felt horrible at times. The devil has tempted me to do the most dreadful things.’

‘Poor devil!’ said the doctor. ‘What a broad back he must have to bear all that the silly world lays upon it!’

‘You laugh. Tell me, what does it mean? How is it? Do I do things in my sleep, or when I am waking, and then do they pass completely away from my memory? Tell me truly, and let me know the worst. Am I going to lose my reason?’

‘No, no, no!’ cried the doctor. ‘Absurd! It is a want of tone in the nerves—a little absence of mind. The liver is sluggish, and from its stoppage the brain gets affected.’

‘Yes; that is what I feared,’ cried Huish excitedly.

‘Not as you mean, my dear boy,’ cried the doctor. ‘When we say the brain is affected, we don’t always mean madness. What nonsense! The brain is affected when there are bad headaches—a little congestion, you know. These fits of absence are nothing more.’

‘Nothing more, doctor?’ said Huish dejectedly. ‘If I could only think so! Oh, my darling! my darling,’ he whispered to himself, as his head came down upon his hands for a moment when he started up, for

Dr. Stonor's hand was upon his arm. 'Oh, doctor!' he cried in anguished tones, 'I am haunted by these acts which I do and forget. I am constantly confronted with something or another that I cannot comprehend, and the dread is always growing on me that I shall some day be a wreck. Oh, I have been mad to link that poor girl's life to such a life as mine! Doctor—doctor—tell me—what shall I do?'

'Be a man,' said the doctor quietly, 'and don't worry yourself by imagining more than is real. You are a deal better than when I saw you last. You have not worried yourself more about the bite?'

'No, I have hardly thought of it. Dog-bite? But tell me, doctor, would the virus from a dog-bite have any effect upon a man's mental organization?'

'Oh no, my dear boy; but you are better in health.'

'I felt so well and happy to-day,' he cried, 'that all seemed sunshine. Now all is cloud.'

'Of course; yes!' said the doctor. 'That shows you how much the imagination has to do with the

mental state. The greater part of my patients are ill from anxiety. Now, look here, my dear John, the first thing you have to bear in mind is that every man is a screw. There may be much or little wrong, and it may vary from a tiny discoloration from rust, up to a completely worn-out worm or a broken head. Your little ailment is distressing ; but so is every disorder. Keep yourself in good health, take matters coolly, and in place of getting worse you may get better, perhaps lose the absence of mind altogether. If you do not—bear it like a man. Why trouble about the inevitable ? I am getting on in years now, and, my dear fellow, I know that some time or other I shall be lying upon my deathbed gasping for the last breath I shall have to draw. Now, my dear boy, do I sit down and make my life miserable because some day I have got to die ? Does anybody do so except a fool, and those weakly-strung idiots who make death horrible when it is nothing but the calm rest and sleep that comes to the worn-out body ? No ; we accept the inevitable, enjoy life as it is given us, make the best of our troubles and pains, and thank God for everything. Do you hear me ?

‘Yes, doctor, yes,’ said the young man sadly. ‘But this is very dreadful!’

‘So is a bad leg,’ said the doctor sharply. ‘There, I’ll speak frankly to you if you’ll sit up and look me full in the face. Come, for your young wife’s sake, shake off this weak nervousness, and be ready to fight. Don’t lie down and ask disease to conquer you. Why, my dear boy, speaking as an old fisherman, you’re as sound as a roach, and as bright as a bleak. Be a man, for your wife’s sake, be a man!’

Huish drew a long breath. The doctor had touched the right chord, and he sat up, looking pale but more himself.

‘Now then,’ said the doctor, ‘I speak to you fairly as one who has had some experience of such matters, but who honestly owns that he finds life too short to master a thousandth part of what he ought to know. I say, then, look here,’ he continued, thrusting his hands through his crisp hair, ‘your state puzzles me: pulse, countenance, eye, all say to me that you are quite well; but you every now and then contradict it. What I tell you, then, is this, and of it I feel sure. It lies in your power to follow either of two roads you

please: You can be a healthy, vigorous man, clear of intellect, save a cloud or two now and then which you must treat as rainy days, or you can force yourself by your despondency into so low a mental state that you may become one of my patients. Now, then, which is it to be, my sturdy young married man? Answer for Gertrude's sake.'

'There is only one answer,' cried Huish, springing up. 'For Gertrude's sake.'

'That's right,' cried the doctor, shaking his hand warmly. 'Spoken like a man.'

'But will you prescribe? Shall I take anything?'

'Bah! Stuff! Doctor's stuff,' he added, laughing. 'My dear boy, that dearly beloved, credulous creature, the human being, is never happy unless he is taking bottles and bottles of physic, and boxes and boxes of pills. Look at the fortunes made by it. Human nature will not believe that it can be cured without medicine, when in most cases it can. Why, my dear boy, your daily food is your medicine, your mental and bodily food. There, be off, go and enjoy the society of your dear little wife. Go and row her up the river, or drive her in the park; go in the country

and pick buttercups, and run after butterflies, and eat bread-and-butter; sleep well, live well and innocently, and believe in the truest words ever written: "Care killed the cat!" Don't let it kill you.'

'No, I can't afford to let it kill me,' said Huish, smiling.

'Never mind your sore finger, my boy; everybody has got a sore place, only they are divided into two classes: those who show them, and those who do not so much as wear a stall. Good-bye; God bless you, my boy! I wish I had your youth and strength, and pretty wife, and then——'

'Then what, doctor?' said Huish, smiling, and looking quite himself.

'Why, like you, you dog, I should not be satisfied. Be off; I shall come and see you soon. Where's your address? Love to my little Gertrude; and John, tell her if—eh?—by-and-by——'

'Nonsense!' cried Huish, flushing with pleasure. 'I shall tell her no such thing.'

'You will,' said the doctor, grinning. 'Oh, that's the address, eh? Westbourne Road. Good-bye.'

'I don't understand him,' said the doctor thought-

fully, as soon as he was alone. ‘He is himself to-day ; last time he was almost brutal. Heaven help him, poor fellow ! if—— No, no ; I will not think that. But he is terribly unhinged at times.’

CHAPTER XIII.

CLOTILDE IS TRIUMPHANT.

PALACE GARDENS, Kensington, was selected by Elbraham for the scene of his married life, and here he was to take the fair Clotilde upon their return from their Continental trip.

‘It’s all bosh, Litton, that going across to Paris ; and on one’s wedding day,’ said the great financier. ‘Can’t we get off it?’

‘Impossible, I should say,’ replied Litton. ‘You see, you are bound to make yours the most stylish of the fashionable marriages of the season.’

‘Oh yes, of course—that I don’t mind ; and I’ll come out as handsome as you like for the things to do it with well ; but I do kick against the run over to Paris the same day.’

‘And why?’ said Litton wonderingly.

‘Well, the fact is, my boy, I never could go across the Channel without being terribly ill. Ill! that’s nothing to my feelings. I’m a regular martyr, and I feel disposed to strike against all that. Why not say the Lakes?’

‘Too shabby and cockneyfied.’

‘Wales?’

‘Worse still.’

‘Why not Scotland?’

‘My dear sir, what man with a position to keep up would think of going there? I’ll consult Lady Little-town, if you like.’

‘Lord, no; don’t do that,’ said Elbraham. ‘She’s certain to say I must go to Paris; and so sure as ever I do have to cross, the Channel is at its worst.’

‘But it is a very short passage, sir. You’ll soon be over; and in society a man of your position is forced to study appearances.’

‘How the deuce can a fellow study appearances at a time like that?’ growled Elbraham. ‘I always feel as if it would be a mercy to throw me overboard. ’Pon my soul I do.’

‘I’ll see if I cannot fee the clerk of the weather for you, and get you a smooth passage this time,’ said Litton, laughing ; and the matter dropped.

There were endless other little matters to settle, in all of which Litton was the bridegroom’s ambassador, carrying presents, bringing back messages and notes, and in one way and another thoroughly ingratiating himself in Clotilde’s favour, that young lady condescending to smile upon him when he visited Hampton Court.

The Palace Gardens house was rapidly prepared, and, thanks to Arthur Litton, who had been consulted on both sides, and finally entrusted with the arrangements, everything was in so refined a style that there was but little room for envy to carp and condemn.

Certainly, Lady Littletown had had what Mr. Elbraham called a finger in the pie, and had added no little by her advice and counsel in making the interior the model it was.

‘For,’ said Elbraham, in a little quiet dinner with her ladyship at Hampton, ‘I’m not particular to a few thousands. All I say is, let me have something

to look at for my money ; and I say, Litton, draw it mild, you know.'

'I don't understand you,' said that gentleman. 'Do you mean don't have the decorations too showy?'

'Not I. Have 'em as showy as you like. Get out with you ; how innocent we are!'

'Really, Mr. Elbraham, I do not know what you mean,' said Litton stiffly.

'Go along with you,' chuckled Elbraham. 'I say, draw it mild. Of course you'll make your bit of commission with the furniture people ; but draw it mild.'

Litton flushed with annoyance and indignation, probably on account of his having received a promise of a cheque for two hundred pounds from a firm if he placed the decorating and furnishing of Mr. Elbraham's new mansion in their hands.

A look from Lady Littletown quieted him, and that lady laughed most heartily.

'Oh, you funny man, Elbraham ! really you are, you know, a very funny man.'

'Oh, I don't know,' chuckled the financier ; 'I like my joke. But look here, Litton, I don't get married every day, and want to do it well. I'm not going to

put on the screw, I can tell you. You furnish the place spiff, and bring me the bills afterwards, and I'll give you cheques for the amounts. If there is a bit of discount, have it and welcome; I shan't complain so long as the thing is done well.'

So Arthur Litton contented himself with calling the financier 'a coarse beast,' declined to be more fully offended, and aided by Lady Littletown, who worked hard for nothing but the *kudos*, furnished the house in admirable style, received the cheques from Elbraham, who really did pay without grumbling, and soothed his injured feelings with the very substantial commission which he received.

Upon one part of the decorations Lady Littletown prided herself immensely, and that was upon the addition to the drawing-room of a very spacious conservatory built upon the model of her own; and this she laboured hard to fill with choice foliage plants and gaily petalled exotics of her own selection.

Her carriage was seen daily at the principal florists', and Elbraham had to write a very handsome cheque for what he called the 'greenstuff'; but it was without a murmur, and he smiled with satisfaction as Lady

Littletown triumphantly led him in to see the result of her toil.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘tip-top—beats the C. P. hollow! Puts one a little in mind of what the Pantheon used to be when I was a boy.’

‘But, my dear Elbraham, is that *all* you have to say?’ exclaimed her ladyship.

‘Well, since you put it like that, Lady Littletown, I won’t shilly-shally.’

‘No, don’t—pray don’t. I like to hear you speak out, Elbraham—you are so original.’

‘Oh, I am, am I?’ he said. ‘Well, you know—well, I was going to say, don’t you think some of those statues are a little too prononsay, as you people call it, you know?’

‘Naughty man!’ exclaimed her ladyship. ‘I will not have fault found with a thing, especially as I brought our sweet Clotilde here, and she was perfectly charmed with all she saw. The flowers are really, really——’

‘Well, they are not amiss,’ said the financier; and he went up to a wreath of stephanotis with such evident intention of picking a ‘buttonhole’ that Lady

Littletown hooked him with the handle of her sunshade, uttering a scream of horror the while.

‘Mustn’t touch—naughty boy!’ she cried. ‘How could you?’

‘Oh, all right,’ said Elbraham, grinning hugely at the idea of not being allowed to touch his own property; and then he suffered himself to be led through the various rooms, one and all replete with the most refined luxuries of life.

‘Now, you do think it is nice, my dear Elbraham?’ said her ladyship.

‘Nice? It’s clipping! Might have had a little more voluptuousness; but Litton says no, so I don’t complain. I say: Clotilde—you know, eh?’

‘Yes, dear Elbraham. What of her?’

‘She ought to be satisfied, eh?’

‘She is charmed; she really loves the place. Come, I’ll tell you a secret. The darling—ah, but you’ll betray me?’

‘No—honour bright!’ cried Elbraham, laying his hand upon the side of his waistcoat.

‘Well, I’ll tell you, then; but, mind, it is sacred.’

‘Of course—of course.’

‘ The darling begged me to bring her up to see the delicious nest being prepared for her ; but it was to be a stolen visit, for she said she could never look you in the face again if she thought you knew.’

‘ Dear girl !’ ejaculated Elbraham.

‘ Yes, she is so sweet and unworldly and innocent ! Do you know, my dear Elbraham,’ said Lady Little-town, ‘ a man like you, for whom so many mothers were bidding——’

‘ Ah, yes, I used to get a few invitations,’ said Elbraham complacently.

‘ I used to hear how terribly you flirted at Lady Millet’s with those two daughters,’ said Lady Little-town playfully.

‘ By George ! no. However, the old woman was always asking me to her at-homes and dinners, and to that wedding ; but I never went.’

‘ I knew it,’ said Lady Littletown to herself. ‘ How mad she must be ! Ah me !’ she continued mournfully, ‘ there are times when I feel as if I have done wrong in furthering this match.’

‘ The deuce you do ! Why ?’ ejaculated Elbraham.

‘ Because my sweet Clotilde is so unused to the

ways of the world, and it is such a terrible stride from her present home to the head of such an establishment as this.'

'Oh, that be hanged!' cried Elbraham. ''Tis a change, of course—a precious great change from those skimpily-furnished apartments at Hampton Court.'

'But show is not everything, my dear Elbraham,' said Lady Littletown, laying a finger impressively upon the financier's arm.

'No, it is not; but people like it. I'll be bound to say Clotilde likes this place.'

'She was in raptures—she could hardly contain her delight. Her sweet innocent ways of showing her pleasure made my heart bound. Ah, Elbraham, you have won a prize!'

'So has she,' he said gruffly. 'I don't know but what she has got the best of the bargain.'

'Oh, you conceited man! how dare you say so? But it is only your quaintness.'

'I say, though,' cried Elbraham, 'she did like the place?'

'I cannot tell you how much she was delighted.'

‘ Did she say anything about me ?’

‘ Oh yes ; she was prattling artlessly about you for long enough—about your kindness, your generosity, the richness of the jewels you had given her. You sadly extravagant man ! I can’t tell you half what she said ; but I really must take you to task for spoiling her so.’

Elbraham coughed and cleared his throat.

‘ Didn’t—er—er—she didn’t say anything about—about my dress—my personal appearance, did she ?’

‘ Now, wasn’t I right when I called you a conceited man ? Really, Elbraham, it is shocking ! I declare you are one of the most anxious lovers I ever met, and I won’t tell you a word she said.’

‘ Oh yes ; come now, do.’

‘ It would be a breach of confidence, and I really cannot give way—no, not on any consideration.’

‘ You are hard upon me,’ said Elbraham. ‘ Oh, by the way, I haven’t forgotten you, Lady Littleton. Would you wear this to oblige me ?’

‘ Oh no, I could not think of taking it, Mr. Elbraham[†] really. It looks so like a bribe, too.’

‘No, no, that it don’t,’ said the financier. ‘I wouldn’t give it to you at first, for fear your ladyship should think I meant it in that way ; but now it is all settled, and you have been so kind to me, I thought perhaps you would not mind accepting that little marquise ring just as a remembrance of, etcetera, etcetera—you know.’

‘Well, if you put it like that,’ said Lady Littletown, ‘I suppose I must take it, and wear it as you say. But it is too good, Elbraham—it is, really. What a lovely opal !’

‘Yes, ’tis a good one, isn’t it ?’

‘Charming ! And what regular diamonds !’

‘I thought you’d like it,’ chuckled Elbraham ; and then, to himself, ‘They’re all alike.’

‘Do you know, Elbraham,’ said her ladyship, holding the ring up to the light for him to see, as she fitted it upon her finger over her glove—‘lovely, isn’t it ?—do you know, Elbraham, that I was going to ask you to do me a kindness ?’

‘Were you, though ? What is it ?’

‘Well, you see, Elbraham, living, as I do, a woman’s life, I am so ignorant of business matters.’

‘Of course you are,’ he responded. ‘Want to make your will?’

‘No, no, no, no! horrid man! How can you?’ she cried, whipping him playfully with her sunshade. ‘I want you to tell me what it means when a gentleman is short of money and he goes to somebody to get a bill discounted.’

‘Simplest thing in the world. If the paper’s good,’ said Elbraham, ‘discount accordingly. I never touch bills now.’

‘No?’ she said sweetly; ‘but then you are so rich. But that is it, Elbraham—if the paper’s good, discount accordingly? What do you call it—the bill? Well, it is easy to have it on the very best note-paper.’

‘Haw, haw, haw! bless your ladyship’s innocence!’ cried Elbraham, with a hoarse laugh. ‘By paper being good I mean that the man who signs his name is substantial—can pay up when it comes to maturity.’

‘Oh!’ said Lady Littletown, drawing out the interjection in a singularly long way, ‘I see now. And that is how a gentleman raises money, is it?’

‘Yes, that’s it,’ said Elbraham, eyeing her ladyship curiously.

‘Would not a lady do?’ asked Lady Littleton.

‘To be sure she would!’ said the financier. ‘Lookye here—does your ladyship want a hundred or two?’

‘Not to-morrow, dear Mr. Elbraham; but my rents do not come in for another month, and I must confess to having been rather extravagant lately—I have had a great deal of company, and I thought I might—might—might—what do you call it?’

‘Do a bill.’

‘Yes, that’s it—do a bill,’ said her ladyship, ‘if some kind friend would show me how.’

‘It’s done,’ said Elbraham. ‘What would you like—two-fifty?’

‘Well, yes,’ said her ladyship.

‘Better make it three hundred—looks better,’ said the financier.

‘But you are not to advance the money, dear Mr. Elbraham. I could not take it of you.’

‘All right; I shan’t have anything to do with it. Someone in the City will send your ladyship

a slip of paper to sign, and the cheque will come by the next post. I say, though, what did Clotilde say ?’

‘Oh, I daren’t tell you. Really, you know—pray don’t press me—I couldn’t confess. Dear Clotilde would be so angry if I betrayed her—dear girl! I could not do that, you know.’

‘Honour bright, I wouldn’t say a word for the world.’

‘Well, it’s very shocking, you know, Elbraham, and I was quite astonished to hear her say it ; but she is so innocent and girlish, and it came out so naturally that I forgave her.’

‘But what did she say ?’

‘Oh, dear child, she clapped her hands together with delight, and then covered her blushing face and cried, “Oh, Lady Littletown, I wish it was to-morrow !”’

‘By Jingo!’ exclaimed the financier to himself, ‘so do I!’

Everybody being in the same mind, the wedding was hurried on. The trousseau was of the most splendid character, and Marie entered into the spirit

of the affair with such eagerness that the sisters forbore to quarrel.

Mr. Montaigne came and went far more frequently, and seemed to bless his pupils in an almost apostolic fashion.

‘I would give much,’ he said, with a gentle, pious look of longing, ‘to be able to perform the ceremony which joins two loving hearts.’

But three eminent divines were to tie that knot, and even if Mr. Paul Montaigne had been in holy orders according to the rites and ceremonies of the English Church, his services would not have been demanded, and he contented himself with smiling benignly and offering a few kindly words of advice.

Miss Dymcox and the Honourable Isabella were rather at odds on the question of intimacy, and Captain Glen would have been religiously excluded from the precincts of Hampton Court Palace private apartments if the Honourable Philippa had had her way ; but Lady Littleton took it as a matter of course that several of the officers of the barracks should be invited, to add *éclat* to the proceedings, and as the Honourable Isabella sided with her, invitation-cards

were sent, and, for reasons that Glen could not have explained to himself, were accepted.

‘Yes, I’ll go, if it’s only to show her that I am not cast down. I’ll go and see her married. I’ll see her sell herself into slavery, and I hope she may never repent her step.’

The next hour, though, he said he would not go, and he was about to keep to his determination, when Dick came in, and announced that he had received an invitation.

‘You’ll go, of course?’

‘Go? No; why should I?’

‘Just to show that you are a man of the world; no woman should fool me and make me seem like the chap in the song—“wasting in despair—die, because a woman’s fair”—you know. Oh, I’d go.’

Glen sat thinking for awhile.

‘I wouldn’t be cut up, you know.’

‘If I thought that she threw me over of her own free will, Dick, I would not care a sou; but I believe that wicked old hag, her aunt Philippa, has forced her into it.’

‘Then you need not care a sou.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Marie told me she accepted Elbraham for his coin.’

‘Yes; she intimated as much to me.’

‘She did! When?’

‘Oh, the other day—the last time I saw her—when I had been to the private apartments, you know.’

‘Oh yes. Ah, to be sure,’ said Dick, who seemed much relieved. ‘Oh, I’d go, dear boy; I would indeed.’

‘I will go,’ said Glen with energy; and on the appointed day he went.

Hampton Court had not seen a more brilliant wedding for years, and the preparations at the Honourable Misses Dymcox’s apartments so completely put Joseph off his head that he, the reputable young man who preached temperance to Buddy the flyman, and was carefully saving up all his money to add to the savings of Markes for the purpose of taking a lodging-house, was compelled to fly to stimulants to sustain him.

The very way in which the dining-room was ‘done up,’ as he called it, ‘with flowers and things’ staggered him, and it seemed no wonder that the greeny stone basin in the middle court should sound quite noisy as

the big squirt in the centre made more ambitious efforts than usual to mount the sky, and the old gold and silver fish stared more wonderingly as they sailed round and round.

But Joseph was not alone in being off his head and flying to stimulants; even cook was as bad, and was found by Markes standing at the door and talking to a soldier—the greatest treason in Markes' eyes that a woman could commit—and reprimanded thereon, with the consequence that cook rebounded like a spring, and struck the austere, temperate, unloving Markes.

It was no wonder, for the sacred department of cook had been invaded by strange men in white apparel to such an extent that from being angry she grew hysterical, and went to Markes, apologetic and meek, for comfort, vowing that she couldn't 'abear' soldiers; but she was so humbled by the austere damsel that she turned to Joseph, who administered to her from the same cup as that wherefrom he obtained his relief.

The wearers of the white caps and jackets brought a *batterie de cuisine*, bombarded and captured the room set apart for cooking, and then and there pro-

ceeded to build up strange edifices of sugar, concoct soups, sweets, and all and sundry of those meats which are used to furnish forth a wedding feast.

The cases of wines that came in took away Joseph's breath, but he revived a little at the sight of the flowers, and shortly afterwards relapsed, staying in a peculiarly misty state of mind and a new suit of livery to the end of the proceedings, during which time he had a faint recollection of seeing the Honourable Philippa greatly excited and the Honourable Isabella very tremulous, as they went about in new dresses, made in the style worn by the late Queen Adelaide, making them both bear some resemblance to a couple of human sprigs of lavender, taken out, carefully preserved, from some old box, where they had been lying for the past half-century.

It was a very troublous time, and Joseph wished his head had been a little clearer than it was. Those wide-spreading Queen Adelaide bonnets and feathers seemed to dance before his eyes and to confuse him. So did the constantly arriving company ; but, still, he recalled a great deal. For instance, he had a lively recollection of the smell of his 'bokay,' as he called

it ; of the young ladies going to the service at the church and coming back in a carriage, behind which he stood with an enormous white favour and the bouquet in his breast, while some boys shouted 'Hurray!' He remembered that, but it did not make him happy, for he could never settle it thoroughly in his own mind whether that 'hurray' was meant for him or for the bride.

That affair of the bride, too, troubled Joseph a good deal, and, but for the respect in which he held the family, or the awe in which he stood of the Honourable Philippa, he would have resented it strongly.

Certainly there were only two horses to the carriage behind which Joseph stood, but it was a particularly good carriage, hired from a London livery stables, with capital horses and a superior driver, who looked quite respectable in the hat and coat kept on purpose for Buddy the fly-driver, although he grumbled at having to put them on, as Buddy had been intoxicated upon the last occasion of his wearing them, and had somewhat taken off their bloom through going back to his stables and wearing them while he lay down in the straw for a nap.

Upon that occasion Joseph had seriously lectured Buddy upon the evils of intemperance.

‘Look at me,’ he said ; ‘I can drink a glass of ale without its hurting me.’

‘Well, the things ain’t improved, suttently,’ said Buddy in a repentant tone. Then scornfully : ‘But as to you and your slooshun of biled brewer’s aperns that you calls ale, why, you might wet-nuss babies on it, and it wouldn’t hurt ’em so long as you didn’t do it when it’s sour.’

‘But it’s a very, very bad habit, Buddy,’ exclaimed Markes ; ‘just look at that hat.’

‘Ah, you’ll have worse jobs than that some of these days when you marries a sojer.’

Mrs. Markes bounced out in disgust.

‘How she do hate to hear the soldiers mentioned, surely,’ chuckled Buddy. ‘Why, she can’t abear ’em. But she needn’t be so hard about a fellow getting a drop ; it’s a great comfort. She don’t know what it is, and never got to that stage, Joe, when everything about you as you taste and touch and smell feels as if it was soft and nice, and as if you’d tumbled into a place as was nothing else but welwet.’

The result was that Buddy's hat and coat were thoroughly taken in hand by Markes and furbished up, the overcoat having to be rubbed and turpented and brushed till it was more in keeping with the style of a wedding garment, while the hat was 'gone over' with a sponge and flat-iron, to the production of a most unearthly gloss, anent which Buddy chaffed the new driver. But of course that was on account of jealousy, that he, the regular ladies' coachman, and his musty-smelling, jangling fly and meagrimed horse should be set aside upon an occasion when there would have been 'a bite to get and a sup o' suthin' just to wash out a fellow's mouth.' For Buddy had a laudable desire to keep his mouth clean by washing it out; and he resented the insult to his dignity upon this occasion by going to the Mitre Tap, and washing out his mouth till he was unable to take this clean mouth home.

As the Dymcoxes sported so dashing a turn-out, and Joseph handed in the bride and took her to church, what he wanted to know was why Elbraham should take her back in his four-horse chariot. Of course he would take her away in it afterwards; but

according to Joseph's idea it would have been far more respectful to the Honourable Dymcoxes if Elbraham had come with his young wife in the hired carriage along with him.

This was a trouble to Joseph, which he objected to largely, wearing a soured and ill-used look on the way back from Hampton Church; and he was not a great deal better when, meeting Elbraham on the staircase, that gentleman slipped a five-pound note in his hand.

The bride looked very beautiful, and Joseph heard that she wore real lace, and it covered her nearly from top to toe. The white satin dress, too, was wonderfully stiff and good, while her bouquet, sent, with those for the bridesmaids, in so many neat wooden boxes from the central avenue of Covent Garden, was 'quite a picter,' so Joseph said.

But somehow it was all a muddle, and Joseph could make neither head nor tail of it. He felt as if he must seize and ring the dinner-bell, or carry in the form for prayers. For instance, there was that Lord Henry Moorpark there, and Captain Glen and Mr. Richard Millet, who had tipped him over and

over again, and ought to have married the ladies. They were there, and so was that tall, dark Major Malpas, who always 'looked at him as if he had been a dorg; and lots more people crowding into the rooms, and a-eating and drinking and talking till the place was a regular bubble.'

Joseph either meant Babel or a state of effervescence, both similes being applicable to the condition of the private apartments on the auspicious day, as it was called by Lord Henry, who played the part of 'heavy father' in the genteel comedy in course of enactment.

Then Joseph—who told himself he had never seen such a set-out since he came, a hungry page from the orphan school—wanted to know why Captain Glen, who had been so huffed about Miss Clotilde's marriage, should be there, and look so jolly, and propose the health of the bride. 'It seemed rum,' Joseph said, 'though certainly him and Miss Marie looked pretty thick now, while little Mr. Millet sat next to Miss Ruth,' who, to the man's notions, was 'the prettiest of the lot.'

Joseph saw and heard a good deal. He saw Major

Malpas place his glass in his dark eye, and, bringing the thick brow over it, stare very hard at the bride, who did not seem to mind it in the least—a fact which made the philosopher declare that ‘Miss Clo had got face enough for anything.’

He also heard Major Malpas, who was perfect in his dress and handsome bearing, say to one of the guests who had made some remark respecting Glen’s appearance, that the Captain was a fine animal, that was all. ‘Too big for a soldier, sah. Looks like a big mastiff, sah, taking care of that little toy-terrier Millet.’

Joseph’s notions of the wedding feast were very much after the fashion of the celebrated coat of his ancient namesake, of many colours, and those colours were terribly muddled up in his brain. They were bad enough before the matter of that five-pound note occurred; after that the unfortunate young man’s ideas were as if shaken up in a bottle to a state of neutral tint in which nothing was plain.

He put that five-pound note, crumpled as it was, either in his breeches or his behind coat-pocket, but what became of it afterwards he could not tell. He

might have taken it out to hold a hot plate, to use as a d'oyley, or to wipe his nose, or to dab up the wine that Mr. Elbraham spilt when he upset his champagne-glass. He might or he mightn't. He couldn't say then. All he knew was that it muddled him, and that the dinner-bell hadn't been rung, nor the form carried in for prayers.

There was another idea came into his head, too, acting like so much leaven, or as an acid powder poured into the neutral alkaline solution already shaken up in his brain. There were those two waiters from Bunter's standing by when Mr. Elbraham gave him the five-pound note, and one of them winked at the other. Joseph could not say that one of those young men took that five-pound note. He was not going so far as to say it. What he was going to say was that they weren't above taking two bottles of champagne back into the pantry and drinking them out of tumblers, and that a man who would take a bottle of wine that didn't belong to him might go so far as a five-pound note.

Joseph grew worse as the morning wore on. He felt as if he must go and quarrel with Markes, and a

great deal of what he recalled after may have been nothing but the merest patchwork of nebulous theories of his own gathered together in a troublous time. For it was not likely that Captain Glen would have been standing holding Miss Ruth's hand, and making her blush, as he called her his dear child, and said she was the best and sweetest little thing he had ever met, and that he should never forget her kindness and sympathy.

Joseph certainly thought he heard Captain Glen say that, and he was near enough to have heard him say it; but he remembered afterwards that when he turned he caught sight of Mr. Montaigne smiling in a peculiar way, but whether at him (Joseph), or at Captain Glen and Miss Ruth, he was not sure. It was a curious sort of smile, Joseph thought, exactly like that which Buddy's old horse gave, drawing back its teeth before it tried to bite, and it made Joseph shiver.

He might have been in everybody's way or he might not, but the Honourable Philippa said that he was to stop about and make himself useful, and of course he did; for if cook chose to give up her

kitchen to a set of foreign chiefs—he meant *chefs*—he was not going to be ousted by Bunter's waiters, even if some of them were six feet high, and one of them looked like a nobleman's butler. Miss Philippa said he was to make himself useful, and see that the visitors had plenty, and he did, though it was very funny to see how little some people took, though that wasn't the case with others.

It was while busying himself directly after the company had left the table that he came upon Captain Glen talking to Miss Ruth.

No, it wasn't Miss Ruth that time; it was Miss Marie. Yes, of course it was; and Captain Glen was saying :

'No, Marie; I hope I am too much of a man to break my heart about a weak, vain woman. You saw how I behaved this morning? Well, I behaved as I felt—a little hurt, but heart-whole. Poor foolish girl! I trust that she will be happy.'

'I hope so, too,' Marie had answered. 'I am sorry, Captain Glen, and I am very glad.'

'Why?' he asked.

‘Because I am sure that Clotilde would never have made you happy.’

She gazed up at him in a curious way as she spoke, and it seemed to Joseph that Captain Glen looked puzzled and wondering. Then his face lit up, and he was going to speak to Miss Marie, when little Richard Millet came rushing up, saying :

‘I say, Glen, hang it all! play fair. Don’t monopolize the company of all the ladies. Miss Marie, may I have the pleasure?’

He offered his arm as if he were going to take her through some dance instead of from the big landing amongst the flowers into the drawing-room; but instead of taking the offered arm, Joseph seemed to see that Miss Marie bowed gravely, and, looking handsome and queen-like, laid her hand upon the arm of Lord Henry Moorpark, who, very quiet and grave, had been hovering about ever since they rose from the table. Then the old gentleman had walked off with her, leaving little Mr. Millet very cross, and it seemed to Joseph that he said something that sounded like a bar across a river, but whether it

was weir or dam, Joseph's brains were too much confused to recall.

In fact, all this came out by degrees in the calm and solitude of his pantry, when he had recovered next day from a splitting headache ; and then it was that he recalled how foolishly everybody behaved when Miss Clotilde—Mrs. Elbraham, he meant—went off with her rich husband : how Miss Philippa wept upon her neck, and Miss Isabella trembled, and her hands shook, when she kissed the young wife ; how Mr. Montaigne seemed to bless her, and afterwards go and stand by Miss Ruth, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm, patting the hand at the same time in quite a fatherly way.

Lady Anna Maria Morton, too, was there, standing with that stuck-up Mr. 'Rawthur' Litton, and Miss Marie with Lord Henry, and Lady Littletown, who seemed to have the management of the whole business, with Captain Glen ; and at last, after the Honourable Philippa had kissed Mrs. Elbraham once again, and then nearly fainted in little Dick Millet's arms, the bride and bridegroom passed on towards the carriage, while people began to throw white

slippers at them, and shower handfuls of rice, some of which fell on the bride's bonnet and some upon the bridegroom, a good deal going down inside his coat-collar and some in his neck. But he went on smiling and bowing, and looking, Joseph thought, very much like a publican who had been dressed up in tight clothes, and then in consequence had burst into a profuse perspiration.

Glen was standing close by the carriage with a half-laugh upon his face as the bridegroom passed, and Joseph thought he looked very tall and strong and handsome, and as if he would like to pitch Mr. Elbraham into the middle of the fountain.

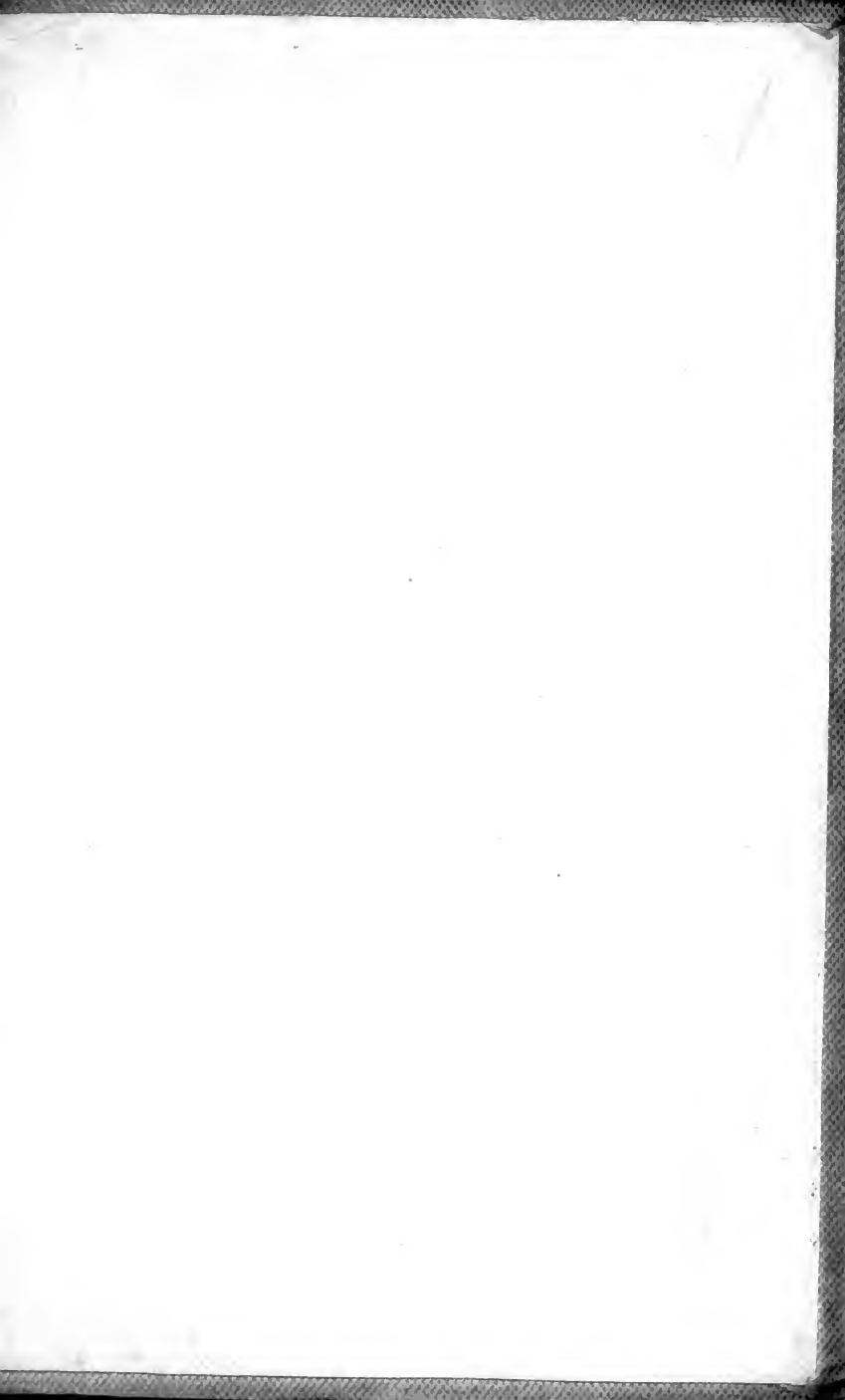
And then, just as they were getting into the carriage, it seemed to Joseph that Miss Clotilde—he meant Mrs. Elbraham, the rich financier's wife—turned her head and looked at Captain Glen in a strange wild way, which made him turn aside and look at Miss Marie, when the bride went for the first time into a hysterical fit of sobbing as she was helped into the carriage, where Mr. Elbraham followed her smiling red smiles. The steps were rattled up, the door banged, the footman waited a moment as the

chariot moved away ; and then sprang up into the rumble beside Mrs. Elbraham's maid, and away went the chariot as fast as four good post horses could take it towards London, bound for Charing Cross Station.

What took place at the private apartments afterwards Joseph did not know, for long before the chariot had reached Richmond, the honest serving-man's head was wedged in a corner between the press bedstead in the pantry and the wall, and his confused ideas had gone off into dreamland, apparently on the back of a snorting horse, bent on recovering a certain five-pound note which was required for tying up a white satin slipperful of rice, which had been emptied out of Mr. Elbraham's glass into a Lincoln and Bennett hat.

END OF VOL. II.





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